

# Inter-Faith Dialogue for Peace and Communal Harmony

*Jointly Organized by*

CBCI Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan - Guntur Kendra

21-22 August, 1999 - Guntur



*Edited by*

Rev. Dr. A. Suresh

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The Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue

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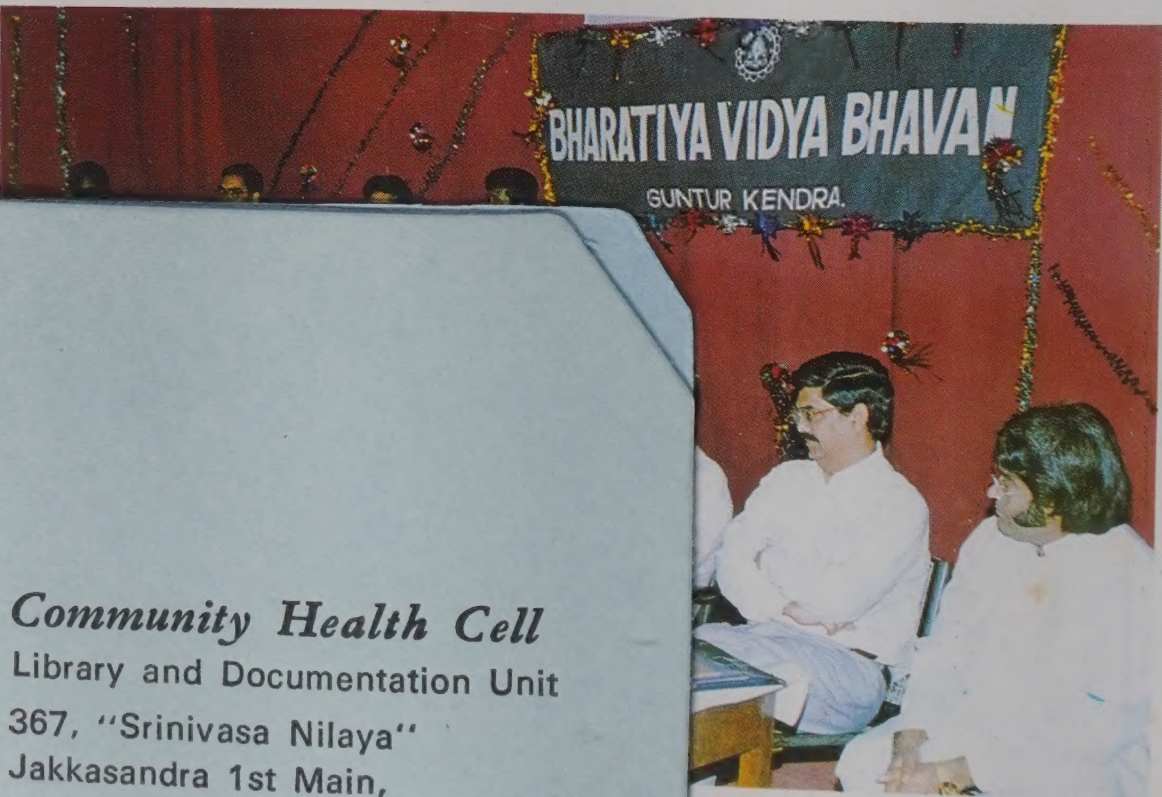
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May 2000

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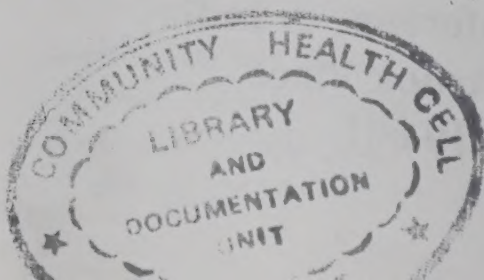
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# CONTENTS

	Pages
Introduction	i
Welcome Address By <i>Dr. K. R. R. Mohan Rao</i>	1
Need for Inter-Faith Dialogue and Co-operative Action Inaugural Address By <i>Most Rev. Gali Bali, Bishop of Guntur</i>	6
Religio-Cultural Approaches Towards a New Society of Unity and Integration By <i>Prof. V. Rama Murthy</i>	16
Role of Religion and Value System in Promoting Peace and Communal Harmony. By <i>Dr. A. S. R. Murthy</i>	24
Indian Religiosity in the Context of Inter-Faith Harmony By <i>M. Rajagopala Rao</i>	35
The Poor and the Oppressed: Meeting of Needs in the Complexity of Inter- Intra-Religious Environment By <i>David Emmanuel Singh</i>	45
Role of Religion and Value System in Promoting Peace and Communal Harmony By <i>Sri A. Krishna Murthy</i>	62



Threefold Universe and Beyond By <i>K. Eswara Rao &amp; K. Srinivasa Rao</i>	69
Integrate Spirituality with Daily Life for True Happiness By <i>P. S. Venkata Ramana</i>	76
Meaning and the Significance of Interreligious Dialogue in India By <i>Rev. Dr. A. Suresh</i>	80
Dialogue among religions : A way to Better Future for Unity and Self-identity By <i>Dr. (Mrs.) V. P. Celia</i>	89
Nation Building & Human Development By <i>M. Ramachandran</i>	98
Inter - Religious Co-operation for Mutual Enrichment Among Religions By <i>K. Ramaiah Sarma</i>	104
Inter-Faith Dialogue for the promotion of Moral, Ethical, Religious and Social Values By <i>Prof. C. Satyanarayana Murthy</i>	110
Vote of Thanks By <i>Narasimha Das</i>	123



## INTRODUCTION

We have already entered into the 21st century, a new millennium. It is a known fact that 20th century has witnessed a tremendous growth in the fields of astronomy, medicine and communication. Man was able to travel through outer space and landed on the moon. The unimaginable development in electronic and computer systems has brought the whole world to our desk. At the same time, we cannot deny that it is in the 20th century the world had experienced the untold miseries. We had seen two world wars which caused great threat to the lives of millions. The relentless spread of HIV/AIDS and the devastating natural calamities in the recent past caused great damage to the life and the property of the people which cannot be described in words. In addition to all, innumerable riots, killings, and wars are waged in the name of religion, caste, language etc.

May be we had given too much importance to the mere materials prosperity and forgotten the spiritual element in us. Since man is made up body and soul, matter and spirit, he has to grow in both, and that is the real growth and fullness of life. Besides, we need to grow in mutual love and trust for our overall happiness. In this regard, religious leaders have to play a vital role at two levels. On the one hand they should work for religious and communal harmony, and on the other hand put up a joint effort for the eradication of poverty, unjust aggression, inequality and all forms of oppression.



Here what Pope John Paul II said while meeting the representatives of various religious leaders at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on 7th November, 1999 is very relevant : “It is a sign of hope that the religions of the world are becoming more aware of their shared responsibilities for the well-being of the human family. This is a crucial part of the globalization of solidarity which must come if the future of the world is to be secure. This sense of shared responsibility increases as we discover more of what we have in common as religious men and women”.

The Commission for Interreligious dialogue, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India is organizing number of programmes at National, and religious levels to unite the people of different Faiths for common action to promote harmony and cooperative action. One such programme, “*Inter-Faith Dialogue for peace and Communal Harmony*”, was organised at Guntur on August 21-22, 1999 in collaboration with the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Guntur Kendra. Sri Narasinha Das, Secretary to Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Guntur Kendra, and his team took lot of effort to make it a grand success. CBCI Commission is very grateful to all of them.

Now we are pleased to bring all the resource papers, lectures and other proceedings of the programme in a book form, so that many more persons will be encouraged to conduct similar programmes for the promotion of peace and communal harmony in our country.

Rev. Dr. A. Suresh



## **WELCOME ADDRESS**

**Dr. K. R.R. Mohan Rao**

*Former Vice Chancellor - Nagarjuna University*

It is my proud privilege and pleasure to welcome you all to this "Inter Faith Dialogue 1999" which is being organised jointly by Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan - Guntur Kendra.

Thousands of years of history have conditioned our people and made our country what it is - an abiding unity and at the same time great diversity. People of many religions live in this country and many great languages flourish among our people. Yet inspite of this variety, there has been a deeper unity which has held us together. Each one of us must realise that the only future for India and her people is one of tolerance and cooperation which have been the basis of our culture from ages past. "Toleration of an opinion even though you disagree with it is a sign of culture and civilisation". (Nehru) Dr. Arnold Toynbee (British Historian) after surveying the story of human race observed "At this supremely dangerous moment in human history the only way of salvation of the human race is the Indian way - Emperor Ashoka's and Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's testimony to the harmony of religions. Here we have an attitude and spirit that can make it possible to the human race to grow together into single family and in this atomic age this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves".



Toynbee echoes the ideal placed before mankind by India's ancient Rishis "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*". India has had an unrivalled tradition of religions' freedom and tolerance. That tradition was born of the consciousness that truth can never be the monopoly of any one sect or creed. The words of Rigveda "Let noble thoughts come to us from every side." Ahimsa, peace and communal harmony are the hallmarks of Indian Culture.

**C.B. Havell:** In India religion is hardly a dogma but a working hypothesis of human culture adopted to different stages of spiritual development and different conditions of life.

The ideal which Bhagvadgita sets before us, "He who sees rest in activity and activity in rest, he is wise among men, he is a Yogi and thorough man of action".

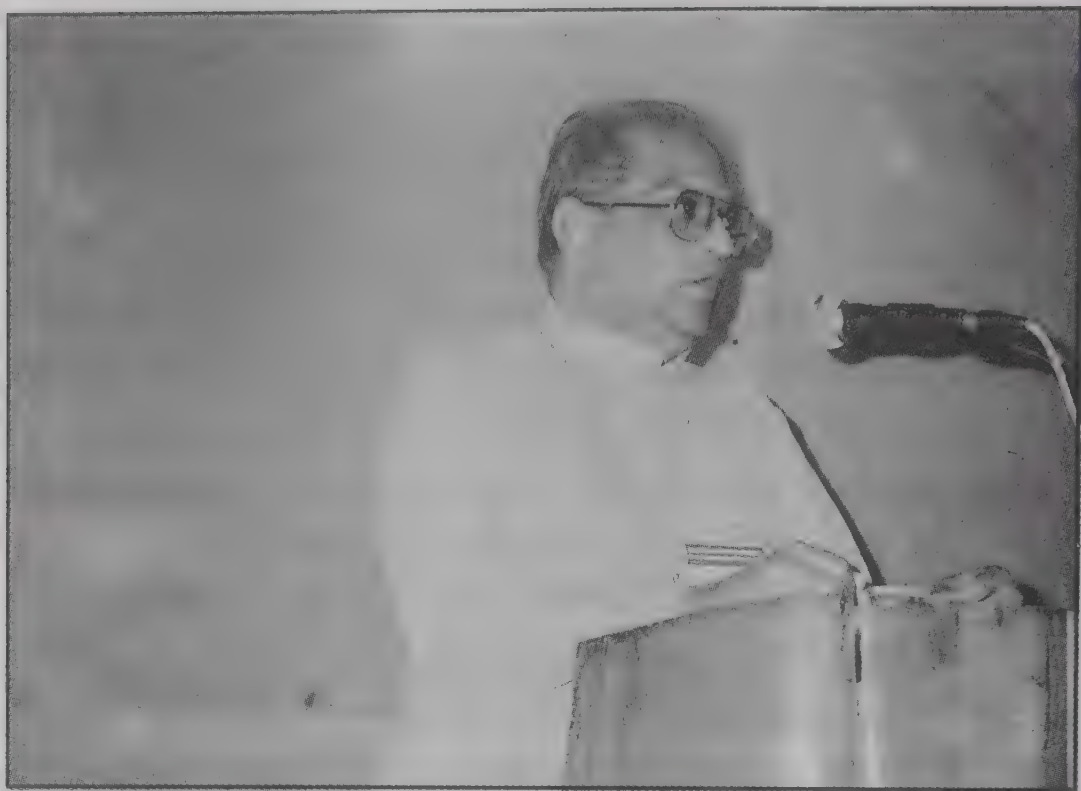
The last decade of this century is the lost decade. Intolerance, communal hatred and bigotry have taken the upperhand. Destruction of Babri Masjid, attacks on Christian community in Gujarat, killing of a Christian Missionary and his two children in Orissa is a blot on our culture. This conference should aim at restoring the lost confidence among the religious communities and strive for communal harmony and peace. We must always remember that every Indian to whatever religion he may belong is a brother and must be treated as such.

We have in our midst Prof. Satchidananda



Murthy a renowned philosopher as Chief Guest, Most Rev. Dr. Gali Bali, Bishop of Guntur to inaugurate the conference, Dist. Judge Sri Apparao, our dynamic Collector and Dist. Magistrate Sri Shashank Goel who is also the Chairman Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Guntur Kendra, Rev. Dr. Suresh, Executive Secretary of CBCI Commission for Dialogue, New Delhi and eminent professors - Dr. P. Lakshmana Rao, Prof. V. Ramamurthy, Prof. A.S.R. Murthy, Prof. Sauravi, Prof. Raja Gopala Rao. I see many distinguished persons in the audience. Let us fight unitedly Religious Fundamentalism and Fanaticism. Let all of us together spread the message of peace, communal Harmony, compassion, non-violence and universal brotherhood.

I extend a hearty welcome to the dignitaries on the dais, distinguished participants and every one in the august audience. I invite your active participation in the deliberations. I wish "Inter-Faith Dialogue" a grand success.



*Most Rev. Gali Bali, Bishop of Guntur  
gives the Inaugural Address*



*Lighting of the Lamp by Sri. P.V.V.A.V. Prasad*





*Sri Narasimha Das introduces the Chief Guests*



*From the Audience Side*



# NEED FOR INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE AND CO-OPERATIVE ACTION

## **Inaugural Address**

*Most Rev. Gali Bali, Bishop of Guntur*

The great historian Arnold Toinbee said, "The meeting and the dialogue among the religions will have to be counted among the great happenings of the 20th century". Today more than ever the world religions, inspite of the differences that separates them, are called upon to make their contribution to the birth of a world that is more human, more just and more fraternal.

We are fully aware how in our own country religions have been the cause of so must animosity, social discrimination, injustice, hatred and blood-shed. Hence our meeting here in a spirit of fraternal dialogue and co-operation should stir the conscience of the nation. At the outset, let us try to understand the difference between religion and spirituality. Religion denotes the differences of beliefs, rituals, practices, customs etc. while spirituality points to the underlying harmony among the religions. Spirituality is the essence or the basis on which religions are built. Inter-faith dialogue would promote liberation of authentic spirituality and its values from the alienating religiosity or religious practices.

The world in which we live today consists of an amazing multiplicity of ideologies, cultures and religions. There are boundaries based on wealth and power,



religion, race and geography and these are perhaps reflections of the barbed wire fences we carry in our hearts. Are we prepared to go beyond mere co-existence or tolerance? Should we not try to get to know one another at a deeper level? Even if we agree to the need to maintain peaceful relations and some kind of social harmony it would be very precocious if we hold back from full appreciation of one another's uniqueness. The Catholic Church teaches that people should have a deep respect for everything that has been brought in human beings by the spirit of God who blows where he wills [RM. 56]. The Church documents further stress: "Acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found in different religions as well as values in their society and culture; then they will learn what treasures the bountiful God has distributed among the Nations of the earth" [Vat II; A.G. 11; NA 2].

## **Requirements or Dispositions for Inter-Faith Dialogue**

### **1. Accepting each other:**

True dialogue requires more than a mere knowledge about people. It is necessary that people encounter each other, with a willingness to accept each other in mutual understanding. To accept one another implies that we recognize one another's differences, respect the others in the diversity of their religious traditions and try to find out more about them. This leads to a growth in mutual esteem and love.

## **2. Mutual sharing:**

We are ignorant of the true identity of one another, even when we think that we possess some knowledge of the other religion. By sharing our human and spiritual experiences we will be able to enter into one another's spiritual resources and gain insight into how they apply them to their personal spiritual journey.

## **3. To venture and run risks together:**

Dialogue is an adventure in which the participants are not sure how things will turn out. They are content merely to have confidence in each other, to begin talking and to take action together. New relationships are thus formed and they are bound to evolve, grow and bear fruit. Whether they like it or not each party in dialogue is revealed to the other. This may cause initial disillusion. Everyone should be aware of this as a risk to be taken. Dialogue can not be perfect in the beginning; there may be times of suspicion and frustration, which might oblige the parties concerned to clarify to themselves the reasons for their encounter and the motives for their co-operation.

## **Four Types or Levels of Inter-Faith dialogue**

### **1. Dialogue of Discourse:**

It is sharing of the tenets, teachings and beliefs of the respective religions on intellectual level. It helps to gain a better understanding of other religions and respect for their beliefs and practices. On one hand it



helps each one to become more aware and appreciate the uniqueness of one's own faith while on the other hand it removes suspicions, prejudices and misunderstandings about the others. The goal of this type of dialogue is truth, that is, to recognize more accurately what others believe and how they respond to the Truth, as well as to clarify one's own beliefs to oneself and to others.

## **2. Dialogue of sharing religious experiences:**

While remaining firmly rooted in one's own faith, each has much to learn from the other. The sharing of religious experiences challenges and transforms those who are engaged in it. Each one grows and is changed through the encounter on a deeper level with committed believers of other faiths, and each one bears the hope that others be equally enriched in the process of sharing. Traditions of meditations, prayers and its spiritual discipline can offer benefits to the believers of various religions. The goal of this type of dialogue is mutual enrichment and it takes place more on the level of the heart.

## **3. Dialogue of Life:**

It means more than mere peaceful co-existence or a passive tolerance of the other community, but rather an active sharing of cultural, religious and social life of the community in which believers of each religion are ready to respect neighbours of other faiths. Mutual sharing in prayers, festivals and celebrations comes

under this type of dialogue and its goal is building of communities characterized by harmony and mutual esteem.

#### **4. Dialogue of Action:**

Believers of various religions, impelled by their religious convictions, confront together the problems of their societies. Questions of justice, defence of the weak and oppressed, support for the rights of others etc. require Inter-Faith cooperation. The goal of this type of dialogue is formation of basic human communities that work together for the good of all, rather than only for one's own group.

### **Inter-Faith co-operation in response to violence in our Society**

Violence is any encroachment on the fundamental rights of an individual or a group. It is the control and subjugation of one human person to the will of another, which diminishes both the dignity of the oppressed and the humanity of the oppressor. As such, violence is a transgression against the created order established by God.

#### **Forms of Violence:**

1. **Social Violence:** when an individual or group is ostracized, demeaned and made an object of discrimination, there is Social Violence.



2. **Cultural Violence:** where a people's values and traditions are invaded, degraded or destroyed by other groups, we find Cultural Violence.
3. **Religious Violence:** where one is denied religious freedom and made to suffer for one's beliefs, where people are looked down upon or discriminated against in law because of their faith, we experience Religious Violence.
4. **Economic Violence:** where people are denied, because of caste or social group, opportunities granted to others, given inadequate pay and forced to take only the most menial work, then there is Economic Violence.
5. **Political Violence:** when persons are dismissed from their positions, arrested, tortured and deprived of their rights because of their political beliefs, we see Political Violence.
6. **Ethnic Violence:** when people are expelled from their lands or subjected to discrimination because their ethnic group is considered threatening or inferior, there is Ethnic Violence.
7. **Gender Violence:** when the dignity and the rights of women are violated, when they are paid less for the same work, sexually harassed denied educational opportunities, or viewed as inferior to or of lesser status than men, there is Gender violence.

8. **Violence against Children :** when they are forced into labour, often in subhuman conditions, subjected to physical or sexual abuse, that is Violence against Children.
9. **Violence to the Unborn:** in abortion particularly in the wide spread modern practices of female foeticide and infanticide.
10. **Violence to one's self-image and Self-respect:** which makes individuals and social groups, feel themselves inferior, backward and dispensable.
11. **State of Violence:** when there are oppressive and discriminatory laws, ruthless or biased law enforcement, unrestricted police practices, summary arrests, long delayed trials, the undue use of armed forces deal with internal disturbances, the suppression of right to dissent and freedom of association, excessive militarization, and the most pervasive of all, corruption in public life.
12. **Violence against the Homeland :** in uprooting and evicting people from their lands on the pretext test of progress or common good.
13. **Ecological Violence:** when nature and its resources are greedily exploited for personal profit without concern for future generations and for contemporaries whose survival depends on



a careful husbanding of the earth's resources, or for the beauty and the variety of creation.

What should be our response to such forms of violence we find in our society? Motivated by our religious convictions and drawing inspiration from religious resources we should try to counteract such forms of violence and establish justice, peace, harmony, unity, love etc. in our Society. Our response is neither of further violence nor that of passive acquiescence. Our response will sometimes demand strong actions of non-violent protest such as fasting and prayer vigils, hunger strikes, dharnas, protest marches and rallies.



*Resource Persons are presenting  
their Papers on the theme of the Seminar*







*Presentation of the Resource Paper*



*From the Audience Side*

# **RELIGIO-CULTURAL APPROACHES TOWARDS A NEW SOCIETY OF UNITY AND INTEGRATION**

**Prof. V. Rama Murthy**

## **Diversity:**

We are now witnessing a great experiment, that is going on in our country. It is the experiment of living together in a pluralistic society. For centuries, India has cradled diverse religions, races, diverse communities and castes, diverse languages and tribes - a diversity unparalleled anywhere in history. Some modern nations like the USA are also engaged in such an experiment, and as more nations become reconciled to diversity, humanity will reach yet another step in the evolution of Man.

Some retarding forces are, no doubt, there with their narrow interests and fanatical beliefs and they do not see eye to eye with other religions. They are fundamentalists who are intolerant of religions other than their own, and on the eve of twenty-first century they cry out for these outmoded holy wars!

The fundamentalists are religionists who are full of dogmatic insights in their religion. They make a literal reading of their religious texts and get stuck with the religious facts. They do not pay attention to the ideas or the values associated with these facts. The religious



facts are peculiar to each religion but the ideas, values and feelings associated with them are universal and they are found in all religions. By their over preoccupation with facts, the fundamentalists lose sight of liberal human values and develop a narrow outlook. They give a call for holy wars. There is nothing holy or war-like in these holy wars. They are savage terrorist attacks committed against innocent people in the name of God or religion. Most often they turn out to be murders committed for trade interests like drug trafficking rather than for a passage to heaven.

Today, religious fundamentalism poses the greatest threat to mankind. The world has already passed through ethnic fanaticism during the second world war and through ideological extremism during the cold war period, and now, even before the cold war has ended religious fundamentalism raises its ugly head. It may soon be followed by CTBT imperialism but, at present, it is the worst threat to human civilization and its diversity. Beware of the "many false prophets that are gone into the world," says the Bible (First Epistle of St. John i.vi)

When all religions in their essence have the same destination i.e., God or Truth, there is no reason why religions should be exclusive in their search after truth. Again, as the world or nature is a manifestation or expression of the creator, should we not treat the diversity of the world with the same reverence that we show towards its creator?

## **Good Guys and Bad Guys:**

There are in every community, good guys and bad guys. A bad guy makes mischief somewhere and it spreads like wild fire destroying both the good and the bad. This bad guy may be an outsider or an insider. He need not be a terrorist. If he wants to pull down a government, he will trigger off a communal clash by getting a few pavement dwellers (whoever they are) killed and then by blaming it on the 'other community'. Or he may send round an anonymous pamphlet abusing one community and blaming it on another community. As religion has become a sensitive issue, these mischief makers make an easy tool of it to cause enormous destruction. Religion has become a trigger in the hands of the bad guys and they exploit it in a hundred diabolical ways to achieve their nefarious objectives. People behind the communal clashes are not ordinary citizens, they are men with money, power and influence.

When Mother Teresa died, all communities were represented at her funeral service. The priests and scholars drawn from different communities gathered together and chanted prayers from their respective holy books. Mind you, such a thing as this has never happened anywhere and perhaps it never happens in any country in the world. The whole world was all admiration and every one marvelled at this supreme harmony in the diversity of our society.

## **Efferent and Afferent forces:**

Our nation has survived for fifty-two years



passing through the worst effects of efferent and afferent forces. The efferent forces are centrifugal forces moving away from a centre and the afferent forces are centripetal forces moving towards a centre. Here, the word 'centre' does not mean the central government. These forces are unifying and separating equilibrants within the psyche of the nation. The equilibrium or harmony in the diversity of our society is generally set up by these equilibrants. These forces however play havoc with the harmony and stability of the nation when they are at cross purposes. Again, the efferent forces are active in peace and afferent forces become active during times of crisis. Theoretically, the afferent or centripetal forces should bring peace but as they operate during times of crisis, peace is denied to us. When there is no external threat to the country, we should have peace, but peace is denied to us as internal conflicts are activated by the centrifugal forces during the time of peace. Whether it is war or peace we are without peace.

When there is no threat from outside, the separatist forces within the country become activated giving rise to a multitude of conflicts. Is not the enemy within far more dangerous than the enemy without? Let us, in the following, analyse some of the areas of internal conflict.

## **1. Education:**

I know a Muslim boy and Hindu boy who studied in the same class and became very good friends. Even

after their growing up, they are still very good friends, even today. Because of this, their families got to know each other and a lot of amity, goodwill and friendship binds them together. I am certain that the friendship between the two boys broadened their outlook and paved the way for its extension to their families. Is such a thing possible in an educational institution which is covertly or overtly meant for a particular caste or community?

Today, our educational institutions, instead of drawing its alumni from different castes and communities and from different parts of the country, are becoming exclusive academic dens meant for a particular community or caste or region. We have now minority colleges, caste-based colleges, and caste and community ridden universities. The quasi-government institutions like the universities are sick and remain paralysed for almost the whole year because of caste-based politics. These foul divisive tendencies on the campuses should make one shudder at the future possibilities of education in the country. The students of these institutions will be like dwellers of some communal islands and not like the inhabitants of the same country. They cannot establish communication outside their community. Can we leave the future of our nation in their hands? Unless politicians, casteists and communalists keep their hands off education, we cannot have the right type of education in this country.

## **2. Personal Laws:**

Different communities in our society have their



own personal laws. In no other country, do we come across such a liberal legal system. The personal laws, according to the majority community, erode equality and common social justice. The minority community, on other hand, apprehends erosion to its religious identity if it loosens its grip on its personal law.

In addition to personal laws, some States have special laws to protect their autonomy. In Kashmir, for instance, a young girl has to forego her right to property if she marries a non-Kashmiri young man. This amounts to a virtual ban on Kashmiri girls marrying according to their choice.

Personal law seems to do well until it infringes on the individual's rights (or fundamental rights as enshrined in the Constitution). A law that governs ruthlessly, deeply personal matters like marriage, divorce or dress is a draconian law that cuts off a whole community from the mainstream of national culture.

### **3. Loudspeaker Prayers :**

In clean habits we have no common identity but in unclean habits we have a strikingly common identity. Sending up loudest prayers towards the sky is one of our unclean national habits. We not only pollute the atmosphere but even inflict torture on one another by making noisy prayers. Is God Almighty deaf? Or are we deaf? It is said that absolute silence is God but who cares? Each community should set an example before the other by making the congregation less noisy. But who will do it first?

#### **4. Conversion:**

The burning issue of conversion has a lighter side to it. As the individual is tossed like a tennis ball from one community to another in the conversion and reconversion game he has found an ingenious solution to prevent the sacrifice of his individuality at the altar of religion. He will continue to remain, say a Hindu, and let his wife remain, say a Christian even after their marriage. Communitywise they belong to two different religions but familywise they are one unit. All communities should take this as a warning signal that affirms the primacy of natural instincts over the community made laws. Some of these marriages are performed twice or thrice - first in a temple, next in a church and, then for the third time, in the office of the Registrar when the couple wants to settle down abroad. Where does conversion stand when the couple worships the picture of Kesava Krishna alongside the picture of Jesus Christ hanging on the same wall?

#### **Cultural Pluralism:**

Cross currents of culture have brought an enriched variety to our society. For instance, in literature, Ghalib is loved by everyone, Iqbal's 'sare jahan se acchha' is as dear to us as is 'Vande Mataram'. Among other things, we show off the Taj Mahal and Char Minar as marvels of our architecture. The Hindus visit the Golden Temple and taste the prasad with reverence. Most of us have forgotten our New Year day and observe it on the first of January. Many of



Hindus visit temples on the first of January with as great solemnity as Christians visit the Church. Hindu children celebrate their birth days by cutting a cake and blowing off candles as done in the Christian community. We bow before a Muslim saint as we enter the sanctum of god Ayyappa on the hills of Sabarimalai. Kabir is held in high esteem by Hindus as well as Sikhs. Thousands of Hindus worship Shirdi Saibaba and they don't bother about his parentage. In music, nadaswaram cassettes of China Moulali are played at Hindu (Telugu) marriages with appreciation. Nazar of Tenali delighted the whole of Andhra Pradesh rhapsodising Telugu folk ballads with great aplomb. The whole country is proud of a Leander Paes or a Dr. Abdul Kalam. What more instances do you want, to see and feel the harmony in our diversity?

It would be absurd for Hindus to think of themselves as pristine Aryans just as it would be absurd for Muslims to think of themselves as descendants of Arabs. It would be equally absurd for Christians to consider Western missionaries as their Big Brothers. We are an amalgam; Indians first and Indians last. We came before our religions came. Our destiny lies in our Indian identity. To try to escape from this identity is to try to escape from ourselves. The Indian identity is the nucleus of harmony in our diversity. Ours is not a divided house but a house of diversity. Let us, therefore, shun isolationism. Let the exclusive caste and communal and other preserves be annihilated. Let us work together to achieve a fuller harmony in our diversity.

# ROLE OF RELIGION AND VALUE SYSTEM IN PROMOTING PEACE AND COMMUNAL HARMONY.

***Dr. A.S.R. Murthy***  
*Retired University Professor*  
Guntur

I shall confine myself to the Hindu religion and faith with occasional references to other religions. Hinduism is one of the major religions of the world. India has been the motherland of Hinduism for a long long time (Several thousand years old), older than any other major religion of the world. It is also known as Arya Dharma and its followers are Aryans. Their earliest home was in Punjab (Land of five rivers), but they spread throughout North India. Agastya rishi crossed Vindhya and propagated Hinduism to South India. River Sindhu is the Western frontier of ancient Aryan settlements in Punjab. On the other side of the river there lived ancient Iranians (Perisians). Now after Partition of India into India and Pakistan, two rivers (Beas and Sutlej) remained in India while three rivers along with Indus (Jhelum, Chenab and Ravi) went to Pakistan.

Hindusthan (or India) is the birth place of many saints, prophets and sages. This religion gave birth to the glorious culture of Hindus. The learned treatises written by them on various subjects such as Grammar, logic, philosophy, politics, Astronomy, Medicine, Surgery, Physics, Chemistry, Engineering and many



other arts and crafts have their roots in religion. The ideas and ideals behind them were inspired mostly by Hindu saints.

In course of time, Jainism and Buddhism off shots of Hinduism spread even beyond borders of other countries of the Asian continent. Hindu civilization was detected in Mexico (N. America). The Hindus would never thrust their religion upon other people by force or stratagem. Peace, love, sympathy and service were their watch words. Hindu ideas even travelled to ancient Greece, the cradle of Western Civilization.

Hinduism has been growing in bulk and variety. Within its fold, there are numerous sects - Vaishnava, Saiva, Shakta, Soura, Ganapatya and Kaumara which constitute Shanmatha. Faith of Sikhs, Arya Samaj, Bhrahma Samaj are derived from Hinduism.

The word 'religion' means a system of faith and worship. Belief in the tenets of Hinduism or church and performance of certain rituals are common to religions in the east and west.

The Hindu word 'Dharma' has a much deeper and wider meaning than the word 'religion'. Everything in the universe has its 'Dharma' - as it must rely on something for its existence. It is the essential nature and the dharma cannot be separated from object. The dharma of man is '*Manava dharma*'. It is the process becoming divine that marks out man from all other beings According to Upanishads - God is present

everywhere. He is in our hearts. We are divine by nature. But as far as our unclear mind stands in the way, we do not perceive it. Lust, greed, anger etc. are impurities and due to them we seem to stand on a level with brutes. Yet, we are not brutes, because we can work our way to divinity which the brutes cannot. This is precisely '*Manava dharma*' Divinity includes full of love, joy, wisdom and strength. Those divine people bring strength, purity and solace to all who come near him.

The holy texts that contain teachings of Hindu seers are Vedas (Shrutis) Smrithis, Ithihasas and Puranas. Vedas are older than any other scriptures of the world. Each of the four Rig, Yaju, Sama and Atharva vedas contain two sections - Samhita (Manthvas) and Brahmana (Yajnas). Certain portions of Vedas (Vedantas) containing cream of Vedas are known as Upanishads. The Upanishads like Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna etc. dwell precisely on the knowledge of God (Jnanakanda) compared to that of Vedas (Karmakanda). Smrithis cover Hindu Shastras not covered by Vedas. Manu and Yajnavalkya speak Varnashrama Dharmas. They prescribe certain acts and prohibit others and thus pave the way how to spend the entire life by Hindu. Rishis like Jaimini, Vyasa, Kapila wrote Dharshanas on the subjects - Sankhya Yoga, Nyaya, Vaiseshika. Each of them consists of Poorva mimamsa (Karmakanda) and Uttara mimamsa (Jnanakanda). The Darshanas composed by Vyasa are known as Brahma Sutras. For the common man, Puranas which also come under Shastras are brought by Rishis where religion is



taught in an easy and interesting way. They are eighteen in number - Vishnu, Siva, Skanda, Padma, Brahma puranas etc. Ramayana, Mahabharatha, Bhagavadgita are other Shastras. The first two of them are also called ithihasas and third the Upanishad. Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Gita are grouped together called '*Prasthanathrayi*'. The founders of important texts of religion base their teachings on *Prasthanathrayi*. They are Advaita Vada (monoism), Vishishtadvaita vada (qualified monoism or more appropriately panorganismic monoism) and Dvaita Vada (dualism). Tantras and allied texts such as Pancharatha Samhita for Vaishnavites and Saivagmas for Saivites prescribe numerous courses of ritualistic worship of Paramatma and divine mother. The latter two texts do not derive their authority from vedas but they are not hostile to them. These sacred texts are open to all castes and both sexes after they are initiated (Dikshita). Thus, those texts bring out communal harmony among people.

The vadic seers realised the great truth that what god really is, can never be delineated by mind or speech. Each sect or religion holds to a reading of the same reality from a particular angle. Each view is correct but can't convey the whole truth about him. They are partial representation of God, but this is questionable from the religious point of view.

As long as man does not realise his oneness with the universal spirit and remains attached to his physical body and the physical universe, he continues in a state of bondage. Even then Hinduism does not damn him

(brutal aspect) forever. It helps him onward step by step till the brute in him disappears altogether yielding place to god.

Now let us consider the relevance of religion, the values and essentials of Hindu Philosophy. Language, culture and religion of one group of people are interrelated with the other in the sense that literary and cultural activities reflect in a good measure the background of religions philosophy and attitude of people which itself is the important role of religion in people's lives.

Emotional attachment to one's own mother religion should be accepted as rational and in keeping with natural urge in mankind. Holding religion as irrelevant to a modern society and pushing it to background are detrimental to society. Hinduism has suffered badly by such treatment over the last several decades. In the name of 'secular' it appears that the constitutional amendment may pave the way for further legislation to ban all organised religious activity in the country.

Before exploring the value and essentials of Hindu Philosophy let us try to understand the cosmology of Gita.

Bhagavatgita is not simply a sermon but a philosophical treatise. Krishna, while teaching Arjuna employs two sets of values - relative and absolute. In the absolute sense, all talk of killing or being killed is



meaningless. Arjuna is bound by the law of Karma - the law of cause and effect. Action should be without fear, favour and without desire. Christians call it holy indifference, while Hindus call it non-attachment. Non-attachment should not be confused with fatalism. Fatalist simply does not care. It is only towards the results of the work that the person remains indifferent.

*'Karmanyaevadhikarethe Maphaleshu  
Kadachina'*

Gita 2. 47

Within this, knowledge grows and we shall realise true nature that is God.

Brahman being absolute, is beyond all action. Ishwara i.e., Brahman united with power creates the universe, preserves it and dissolves it. Brahman's power cannot be separated from Brahman as heat of fire cannot be separated from fire itself.

Ishwara creates himself a body out of Prakriti whenever he choose to be born among men. He is god and remains a master of prakriti even in his human form. Thus he differs from an ordinary mortal. Man also is the Atman associated with Prakrithi or Maya. Visisthadvitins do not accept the concept of Maya. Sareera - body, Achetana and Sareeri. - Atma - Chetana. To understand Atman he should be liberated from the process of birth and death. The liberated man cannot be reborn, as he is no longer subject to power of Prakriti. He joins the galaxy of Nithya Suri's in Sri

Vaikuntha. Atma is embodied, but Paramatma is dictator and so the latter controls the former. Man's ideals and value are relative perpetually evolving. The goal is not known, but its direction is apparent. So it is better to approach than reach the goal. Scientists also tell that everything is relative. From a scientific point of view absolutely pure is ideal which cannot be reached. According to religion also Suddhasattwa is attributed to Paramatma only, which in human beings all three gunas Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas are held in particular ratio.

According to the Gita, living even the life of a householder, man can realise God through renunciation. This includes, three stages.

1. Total renunciation of prohibited acts - theft etc.
2. Renunciation of acts for the satisfaction of wordily desires - objects of enjoyment.
3. Renunciation of habits of extracting service from others with a selfish motive.
4. Total renunciation of worldly thrust, Karma
5. Total renunciation of indolence and desire for fruit in the performance of duties.

This constitutes first stage of renunciation. At this stage, all evils and all forms of desire are destroyed - these remains only the one desire

for God realisation. Man has attained ripeness in the first stage of wisdom.

6. Total renunciation of sense of meum and attachment with regard to all wordly objects and activities Men, when they reach this stage (second) get exclusive love for God alone, the supreme embodiment of Love. They like to hear and talk about the stories of God's spotless love, practice meditation, Bhajana. They perform all duties only for God's sake, developing a distaste for wast even a moment of valuable time in indulging laughter luxury and back biting. God is the embodiment of Existence, knowledge and Bliss.
7. Total renunciation of subtle desires and egosism with regard to world, body and action. Due to total lack of identification with body, no trace of any sense of doership is found. This is the third and final stage of renunciation. Men get totally withdrawn from all objects of the world. Close union of such persons with Vasudeva, the Paramatma, the embodiment of Existence, knowledge and Bliss constantly remains intact. This is possible in Sanyasa Ashrama.

The values and essentials of Hindu Philosophy are summarised here.

1. Essence of religion relates to attitude of mind, but not physical body.



2. Social Service for poor and hungry should be an integral part of religious life. The relation between individuals is expressed in terms of duties.
3. The unworthy fight for power and privilege has to be given up, renunciation and service have to be revived.
4. There exist many diversity of castes and communities but hatred or rancour should not be between them. Each group is sacred and has to play its part in the symphony of Hindu life. Things like untouchability have to be banned. Hindus of the present day are becoming conscious of the above.
5. Being aware of spiritual presence within one self, we have to help the fellow human beings in rendering selfless service in socio-economic and spiritual fields.
6. Love and compassion in working life secure harmony in all that is manifested in creation. This is possible because of existence of the supreme spirit.
7. The soul is divine in nature. The person grows wiser through sufferings he had in previous births and proceeds through various births till the divinity in himself is manifested or the soul is liberated. If we follow the principle of unity in diversity - the value of it being "I am one - may I be many," all human problems - individual or

social will be solved. Thus communal harmony, but not rigid uniformity is the divine law of nature. This will contribute towards peace and well being of society.

8. Variety in religion is being looked upon a source of richness in human culture. Each religion is a correct path to the same goal of perfection and each has its use for a particular group of people.
9. Ishwara manifests himself as the ceaseless and countless objects in nature and by governing them all within as Antaryami.

These principles are mostly common to other religions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism which have sprung from Indian Soil.

### **Conclusion :**

The present religious situation calls for an action plan.

1. Value oriented education should be imparted to the young against a truly religious back ground.
2. All aspects of Philosophy, mythology, several customs and interactions within community on festive occasions associated with religion provide a good base for propagating universal values to be observed in life. So provision should be made for that in religious life.
3. For value oriented education, schools run by religious institutions and social service bodies

should evolve programmes for strengthening the base of religion.

4. Special lectures and discourses should be arranged by schools regarding philosophical doctrines of great personalities like Swami Vivekananda and Dr. Radhakrishnan. Parents also should be aware of spiritual values of religion.
5. Watch the mischievous tactics adopted by political groups to overplay secular and prevent the revival of our own heritage and culture. This will come in the way of universal peace and harmony.
6. People should also be educated about the relevance of religion.

We must bear in mind that Hindu life is built up on strong formulation and structure and so it has lasted through scores of centuries in spite of invasion, colonization and domination by alien forces. In order to preserve our culture, Hindus are expected to regard every human being as Narayana (Paramatma) which can be realised from the lofty message of Upanishads.

*Om tatsat*



# INDIAN RELIGIOSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF INTER-FAITH HARMONY

**M. Rajagopala Rao**

It is in tune with the current age and temperament that religious leaders felt the need to explore harmony between religions that have been treading independent and sometimes hostile paths believing in the ultimacy of the truths they propound and permanency of their existence. Let us hope that their efforts succeed and they would be able to find that harmony that may finally lead them to discover "a common religious faith to guide the whole of mankind" making the dream of Dewey a reality.<sup>1</sup>

We are at the threshold of a new millennium, ready to enter the emerging new world brought about by the explorations of modern science and advances of technology. We are in to face new realities necessitating the need to re-examine and re-value all that has been near and dear to us. The whole world now moves before our eyes with its people inhabiting several regions, following many customs and traditions cultures and civilizations, faiths and practices providing all scope to study them comparatively and understand their significance. We may feel outdated the division of humans by race, colour, creed, region, language and so on. We may become suspicious of the teaching that the world was created suddenly in 4004 BC or that virtue has been on the decline from the Age of Truth -

Satya Yuga - through Treta and Dwapara yugas reaching its rack bottom in Kali yuga that is said to have begun in 3102 B.C. Nor are we tempted to believe any more with one or seven heavens above us and hells underneath. We may prefer to stand by Mathew Arnold that it is the mind that makes heaven of hell and hell of heaven.<sup>2</sup> and echo Radhakrishnan's observation that the kingdom of heaven is within us.<sup>3</sup> We will agree with the prophecies of Radhakrishnan that there is need for the emergence of a new type of human being to adjust to this new world and that the unity of the world can be achieved by the cooperation of different religions of the world.<sup>4</sup> It is this perspective that makes us march ahead today.

While major religions of the world have been believed to be revelatory, many adopting the scientific approach, understand Religion without Revelation<sup>5</sup> and studied it from various aspects psychological, anthropological, sociological, historical and defined it variously that religion is a product of human needs and desires<sup>6</sup> of man's fears and hopes<sup>7</sup>, it is the moral idealised<sup>8</sup> and so on, and classified it as ancient and developed, primitive and modern, static and dynamic and so on. Scholastic or philosophical understanding tends to make it absolutistic by its ontological, epistemological and eschatological apprehensions. A comprehensive definition of religion "as a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances and often having a

moral code for the conduct of human affairs,"<sup>9</sup> carries all these ideas.

But religion derived literally from Latin "religion" means 'consciousness', 'piety' and from "religare" means 'to fasten', to bind to something higher, brings it closer to the Bhagavadgita conception of 'bhaktiyoga' or even the 'prapatti' of the Vaisnavas. It is in this sense that religion, specially revealed religion, is taken in India. It may not exactly fit into the word 'dharma' adopted in the North and 'mata' adopted in the South but they are understood and interpreted to mean the same for centuries. This religion of the people by the people and for the people is, in fact, not an academic discipline. It is a life to be lived not a theory to be accepted or a belief to be adhered to. It is the experience and emotion of the devotee that binds him to God, the god of his heart. It defies any rational explanation or ratiocination or analytical understanding. It has to be taken in totality and can be reached by experiencing that basic urge of faith in man that is the source of his beliefs or opinions.<sup>10</sup> In this religion, the true religion of man, he lives and expresses himself fully through his inward and outward expressions that shows how religious he is. This is what we call his religiosity. 'Religious' and 'religiosity' are almost equal and that constitutes the nerve cell of Indian religions life or religiosity of any devotee in India. People may differ in their faiths or religion but their religiosity remains the same. It is this factor that is unique for the Indian that attracted the attention of thinkers over the world.



Radhakrishnan cites the observations of two great thinkers in this connection. Arnold Toynbee observed that "Indian religions are not exclusive minded. They are ready to allow that there may be alternative approaches to the mystery."<sup>12</sup> Albert Schweitzer writes "This catholic minded Indian religious spirit is the way of salvation for human beings of all religions in an age in which we have to learn to live as a single family, if we are not to destroy ourselves"<sup>13</sup> Radhakrishnan himself asserts "we should treat all religions as friendly partners in the supreme task of nurturing the spiritual life of mankind." Nothing better can be said, I think, in bringing out the nature and essence of Indian religiosity.

I am not sure of what exactly is meant by "Indian Religions" by Toynbee and Schweitzer. I venture to include in it all religions - Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Parsi and whatever known and unknown denomination are being practised by millions and millions in India. They all exhibit the same religious spirit, that Indian religiosity faith, devotion, celebration, tolerance and compassion. It is not only native religions but also those that got implanted here in the course of centuries imbibed this spirit of Indian religiosity. We know how individuals and societies influence and get influenced when they get in touch with other men and societies. There cannot be any exception in the case of religions. Even if religions claim to be results of divine revelations, forms and contents are necessarily the products of the human mind<sup>14</sup> and religions as living organisations change as a whole in response to the needs of the age.<sup>15</sup> The religions that were born in India and those that

migrated here from outside would necessarily undergo changes adopting to the needs and aspirations of the people that follow them and thus get Indianised. This is as natural to a religion as of a human being. That is why we find world religions, continuing under the same name, differing vastly in practices and observances from country to country and from time to time. Thus we have in India the Indian variety of Christianity, Indian variety of Islam, Indian variety of Persian.<sup>16</sup> and so on. They broadly exhibit the same Indian spirit though they differ in details. This is true of all the common devotees, the masses that form the strength of any religion in India.

Religion becomes a part and parcel of their very being. They get inseparably involved in it. They live in it and die in it. It is the god of their heart that rules them and guides them. It may be one or many, universal or local, man, animal, bird, tree or any object of worship that they inherit through their family and tradition. They put their heart in it and dedicate themselves to it. They do not discriminate between one god and another. They get attached to their own god and respect the gods of others on equal footing. It is not the object of worship that counts here but the measure of their veneration, their devotion and the deep felt dedication that forms the standard of their religion. They do not bother about who and when the world was created, how it has come to be, how and when it is going to end and so on. Their concern is for themselves, for their neighbours and for the society at large, the success and failure, the good and bad to which it is inextricably linked with

their own. They appeal to their gods in difficulties and attribute their welfare to that god. When they feel blessed they celebrate in veneration of god. This is the religion of the Indian masses and the way they live it, is the spirit of Indian religiosity.

Philosophers may not accept this popular religion. They may consider it unspiritual or untruthful and unworthy, both of divine and men, since they do not think of the things that matter most for the philosophers. They may even consider it irreligious and an offence against spiritual intelligence, for popular religion accepts all that is inherited and worship mythical figures as gods<sup>17</sup>. True religion for them is philosophy which purposes subjectively to nourish the divine part of the man and objectively to put him in contact with the reality which is the ontological divine.<sup>18</sup> This sort of religion, even if it is called religion, can neither be comprehended by the common man nor means anything for him. The common man needs a personal god that can readily help him and save him from dire consequences and live with him all through.

This popular religion may not be relished even by the preachers of various religions and more so of those that make a living out of religious propaganda. Religious preachers learn and preach the scriptures of their own organised religions. It is their business to be thorough with them and highlight all the best in them and ridicule the follies of other religions, at least occasionally. It is this, wittingly or unwittingly that leads to religious animosities and breed mutual hostilities and



conflicts. It is well known that religious fanaticism is one source of communal fights and national wars. It is for this reason that organised religion has come to be treated as the invention of priests to strengthen their power on the group.<sup>19</sup> It is for this that Jesus asks us to free ourselves from priestly control<sup>20</sup>. It is about these religions that Jonathan Swift lamented that we have enough religion to make us hate one another but not enough to make us love one another.

This tendency is not there in the Indian religious spirit. It is not an organised religion. Its weakness turns out to be its strength. Even if Hinduism is taken as a religion "it is not a sect but fellowship of all who accept the law of right."<sup>22</sup> Inclusion of atheistic Buddha in the fold of the ten incarnations and absorption of all that is good in Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam, only proves how impossible it is to brand it as one religion or define it in that perspective. The popular religion of India knows no strict religious boundaries. It is here that we find Mastan Rao's and Saida Rao's among Hindus; Christacharis and Luther Sastries among Christians; Sambavalis and Venkata Sahebs among Muslims. It is in India alone that we find common religious celebrations open to everybody. We do not find any exclusive characteristics of them. The Kotappakonda Tirunalas and Pushkarini utsavas are attended by all - Hindus, Christians and Muslims - without any discrimination. The same is the case with the much Indianised Christian celebrations of Gunadalamata or Sagaramata Tirunalas, and Hindus and Christians throng in thousands to the festivals at

the Muslim Dargas and worship Muslim valis. All these festivities are presided over by their respective priests and they deliver their religious sermons but common people participate in them unmindful of what is going on at the helm of affairs. That is the spirit of Indian religiosity that shines all through. The same common influences and patterns can be seen in domestic celebrations of birth, marriage, death and so on.

We will find the same common, naive, religious spirit even in the Mahatmas and Maharshis, the saints and sages, the Khalifas and Asslums. They make no distinction between man and man, god and god. They only distinguish good and bad, avoid what is bad, and follow what is good, and stand as examples for all men and humanity at large. We find in Indian tradition Ramakrishnas and Ramana Maharshis accepting and worshipping Jesus and Mohammed along with Rama and Krishna. We have a Kabir and a Tukaram singing the songs of Hindu gods. We have the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi who identified Ram, Rahim and Robert. This rich tradition was further nourished by the well known services of Mother Theresa. She was a mother for all those in need of help. Their lives stand out as models for emulation of all people over the world. They attract the attention and devotion of all alike.

It is gratifying to note that the same spirit is continuing through the modern movements and even at present times. How Indian religiosity absorbs everything good, and evolves as for the needs of the

people, and reaches out to everybody stands amply demonstrated by the comprehensive symbol adopted by the Sayee devotees in their unified figure of Oum, Cross, Crescent and fire pot (parsi). It is this eloquent expression of the continuity of Indian religiosity that stands out as a model for the rest of the world. This can be best helped, I think, by restricting preaching to religious places, rescuing the common man from religious fanaticism of all sorts and restore religion to its pristine purity cleansing it of all extra encroachments. Religion can be invigorated and religious harmony can be achieved, if religious activists lead pious lives and confine themselves to preaching piety. If all those concerned with religious training - parents, teachers, preachers and government agencies - do not treat religion hereditary and leave it to the choice of an individual to choose his religion when he comes of age. It will go a long way in preserving individual religious freedom, and make way for the emergence of universal religious outlook, and help establish universal brotherhood on the basis of common faith. This may perhaps make religions also put on their best and avoid all that they consider worst to attract the young in large numbers to their fold.

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4. Ibid, Ch. 2., P.48
5. J.Huxley wrote a whole book on "Religion Without Revelation.
6. J.C. Feaver & W. Horosz (ed.) opcit., Part II, Ch.11,, P.312.
7. Ibid., p.310
8. Ibid, Part I, ch. 3, p.63
9. Random House Dictionary
10. Ibid
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12. S. Radhakrishnan, opcit., Ch. 2, p.50
13. Ibid, Ch. 1., p.20
14. Ibid., Ch.2, p.25
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16. Persian region is continuing in practice only in India.
17. J.C. Feaver & W.Horosz (ed.) opcit., Part I, Ch.2, pp. 38-9
18. Ibid., p.40
19. Ibid, part II, ch.12, p.343
20. S. Radhakrishnan, opcit., ch. 3, p.57
21. This word cannot be traced in any of the ancient Sanskrit texts. But it has come to stay to represent the religious spirit of the puranas.
22. S. Radhakrishnan, The Hindu view of life, Ch. 1, p.13.

# **THE POOR AND THE OPPRESSED: MEETING OF NEEDS IN THE COMPLEXITY OF INTER-INTRA- RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT**

**David Emmanuel Singh**

The short paper below attempts to provide a framework to understand inter and intra - religious incompatibilities particularly with reference to the majorities of the poor and the oppressed low-castes. The model attempts to show how the poor and those suffering do have their needs met within a complex religious environment.

## **The Basic Model**

H. Presler has written about two kinds of 'disjunction'.<sup>1</sup>

### **1. Disjunction between religions:**

Religious groups or endogamous circles [EC] do not associate with each other on account of ethnic, economical, social or theological disjunction.

### **2. Disjunction between sub-groups within a religion:**

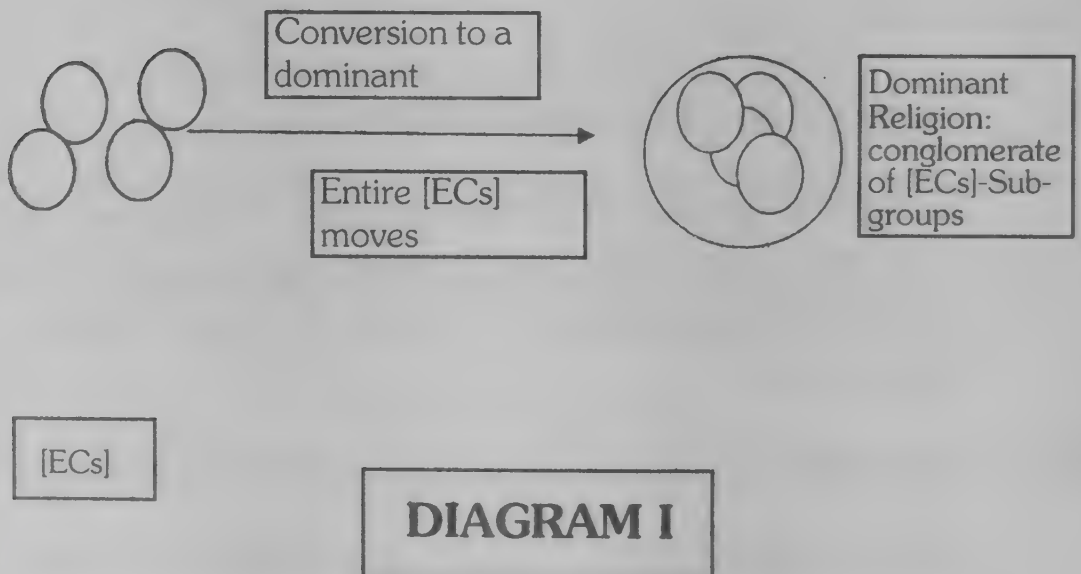
Sub-groups within a particular religion remain distant from each other on account of ethnic, economical, social or theological disjunction.

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<sup>1</sup>*Practice of Toleration*

## Application of the Model: The case of Islam and Hinduism

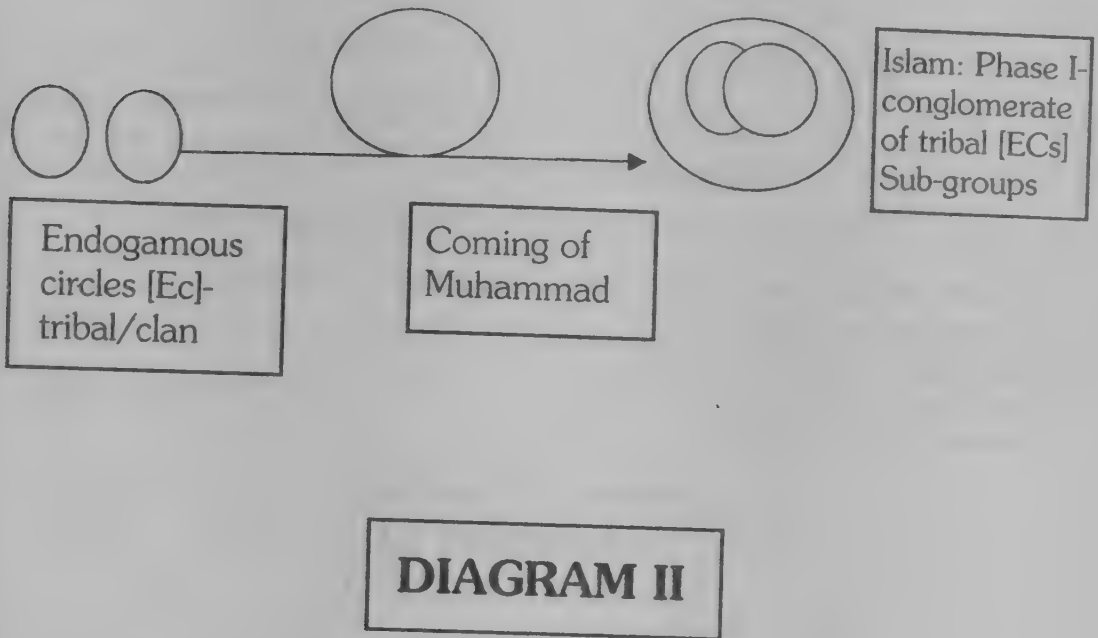
The **diagram I** below illustrates that when a religious community or EC adopts a dominant religion it brings with it its old social, economic, ethnic and theological baggage and assumes the role of a sub-group within the religion of their choice. Thus some of the old incompatibilities continue. Factors that keep people distant from each other at (1) also keep co-religionists at (2) distant from each other. But in the case of (2), the incompatibilities are tolerated or ritually justified thereby creating a positive environment. Mutual crossing-over of individuals between sub-groups becomes possible without having to permanently break away from their respective groups.



The Diagram II below shows that pre-Islamic Arabs were divided into tribes and clans based on ancient



kinship, traditions, rivalries, feuding and violence. These disjunctions were in theory disciplined by 'egalitarian Islam'.<sup>2</sup>



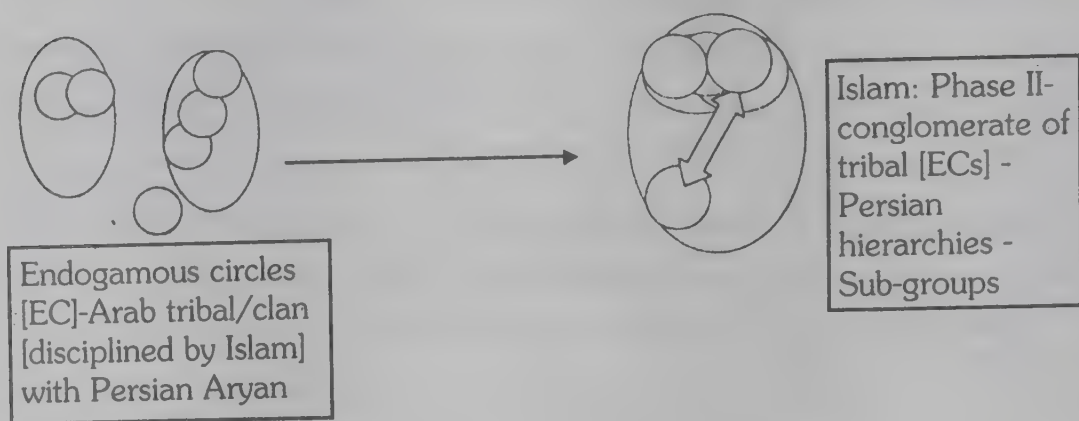
**Diagram III** below shows that when 'ritually equal' Muslim Arabs conquered Aryan Persians in 640 CE, they encountered newer kinds of incompatibilities.<sup>3</sup> For instance, inequalities based on urban, economic, social, racial and theological differences and uniquely Aryan notion of *varnadharma*.<sup>4</sup> A fusion of two cultural groups took place and the Persian Aryan system was adopted in practice. The Persian serfs continued as a distinct subgroup with the system was adopted in

<sup>2</sup> See Surah XLIX: 13: IX:2.

<sup>3</sup> See *Practice of Toleration*.

<sup>4</sup> A way of life and subgroup incompatibilities based on colour in a particular religious system. For instance white denoting highest class, red denoting ruling elite, gold denoting business class and black or brown denoting out-castes-servants-slaves.

practice. The Persian serfs continued as a distinct subgroup with the system but the distinctions were tolerated.

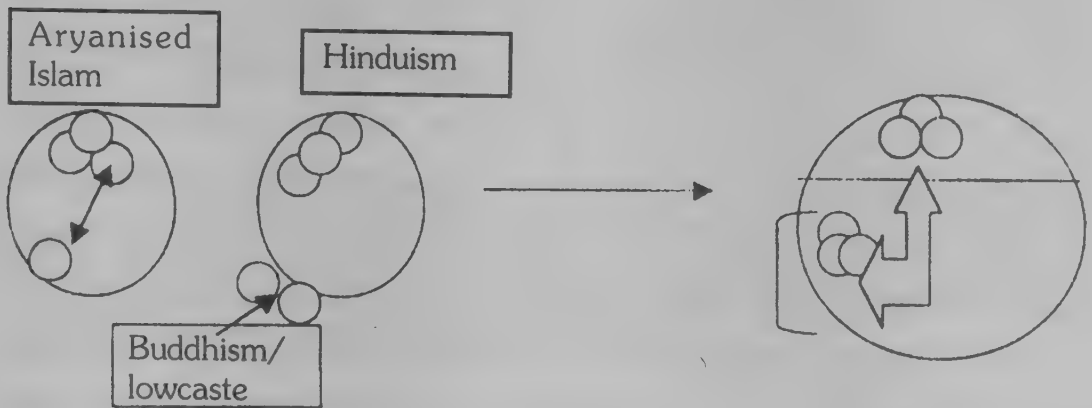


### DIAGRAM III

Consequently, beginning from the 12th century, Muslim conquerors of the Indian subcontinent were distinctly divided into - Religious doctors (ulama and Sufis) nobility (ruling class), merchants and serfs sub-groups. A complex socio-political system harbouring sub-group disjunction was already within India when Muslims arrived because the Aryans had preceded Muslims into India. This system was based on colour and racial disjunction and is also called 'Caste' <sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Aryans used the term dharma [from *dhree*-meaning 'to hold' or that, which holds]. Thus religiously- Aryan *dharma* [erroniously called Hinduism] was a conglomerate of various religious visions, sects, philosophies [theistic and atheistic] and sociologically - Aryan way of life brought together class, colour, ethnic-racial incompatibilities and integrated them all in a cohesive system. Justified by myths that enabled co-religionists to tolerate disjunction. This system containing complex incompatibilities was called *varnadharma*. *Varnadharma* or caste in India contained within it four basic sub-groups corresponding to the Aryan Persian sub-groups-

The **Diagram IV** below shows that a large number of Buddhists and the low-castes in the subcontinent converted to Islam. These converts were placed alongside the serfs in the social hierarchy that was already existent within Islam. Foreign Muslim rulers though a minority in the subcontinent's Islam, naturally saw themselves as racially superior (*ashraf*)<sup>6</sup> to the great numbers of low-caste Muslims converts (*ajlaf*).<sup>7</sup> This system allowed the low-caste converts to continue their distinctive practices and also permitted crossings-overs of the *ashrafs* to the 'heterodox' institutions of the *ajlafs*.<sup>8</sup>




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Level I

*Brahmins*

*Khshatriyas* [Minority/belonging to the original Aryan stock]

*Vaishyas*

Level II

*Sudras* [Majority/original inhabitants who were conquered and integrated in the system]

<sup>6</sup> The foreigners were divided into class groups similar to the Indian caste. *Ashrafs* were one of several levels among them. For the sake of convenience I am using the term *ashraf* to refer to the entire group of Muslim foreigners.

<sup>7</sup> See Yoginder Sikand. "The Changing Nature of Religious Authority in Twentieth Century South Asian Islam" in *The Bulletin*, vol 16, nos., 1 and 2, January-June 1997, pp 5-22. (Henceforth cited as "South Asian Islam")

<sup>8</sup> See appendix I : CASE I



#### DIAGRAM IV

The shifting of the power balance from the *ashraf* to the British after the so-called 'mutiny' in 1857 CE was a grave crisis for the *ashraf* ruling class. When *ashrafs* were ruling over the majority of non-Muslims and the kingdom was stable, the state sponsored a religious ideology, which was more universalistic<sup>9</sup>. But, when a minority of Muslim elite rulers were outnumbered by the Muslim converts from among the ruled states and the elite political power was destabilising, the elite became more inward looking and their religious policy became more religiously militant and 'orthodox'. They began to see disjunction between them and the *ajlafs*, which had been ignored in most cases. They felt that the *ajlafs* were weakening the elite Muslims' combined economic and ideological power in a context of the rising external political challenge. The *ajlafs*' ideological visions were considered heresies and they were blamed for having caused the wrath of God upon Islam on account of

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<sup>9</sup> A Kevin Reinhart in his *Before Revelation: The Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). For instance. Reinhart points out that during the Abbasid caliphate Islamic revelation was understood as a 'confirmation' of the universal religious knowledge of God and his laws.

their un-Islamic practices that they had imported into Islam.

The *ashrafs* undertook a massive programme of Islamization in a bid to purging the *ajlafs* of 'un-Islamic' practices and thereby creating conditions for the return of Muslim political power. It was for this reason that Islamization was singularly led by the *ashrafs*, among whom Mawdudi was once one of the most important figures.<sup>10</sup> Islamization was a tool through which the *ashrafs* attempted to integrate the *ajlafs* with in his vision of 'Islam' Mawdudi's democracy' was in this context an attempt to integrate vast numbers of Indian converts in concept with in his Islamic political ideology.

Two factors to do with the colonial administrators must be kept in focus in this background, because these aided the process of Islamization:

1. When the British established their paramountacy in the subcontinent:
  - a. The British were a minority ruling over a majority made up of disparate religious

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<sup>10</sup> See Altaf Gauhar. "Mawlana Abut A la Mawdudi-A Personal Account" in *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of.... Mawdudi*, eds. K Ahmad and Z.I. Ansari. (Delhi Markazi Maktaba Islami 1987). Pp. 265-288. Though not all elite followed Mawdudi's line Particularly in regions where Muslims were a majority the ruling elite had also established a close relations with the British in hope of gaining an opportunity to rule after the British left. Such elite opposed Mawdudi. It was for this reason that after the creation of Pakistan Mawdudi was branded as a threat in Pakistan.

traditions, ethnic, language backgrounds. They subscribed to a political ideology, which sought to create space for plurality.

- b. The British law supervened *shari'a* in principle
- c. The Muslim ruling classes were stripped of political power
- d. The British left them in charge of their religion and customs to regulate religious-personal-family matters.<sup>11</sup>

This arrangement was beneficial for both parties. It was an opportunity for the British to circumscribe the influence of *shari'a*, but for the Muslim elite it was an opportunity to extend their influence over the vast majority of Indian Muslim who were largely ignored. Political influence was not possible when the British were in power, but they were free to define their religion and prescribe a code of conduct to govern religious and personal affairs. It was the only way that the elite could continue to wield influence over the masses.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>There is evidence for this process of mutual benefit from the British administration in Malaysia. See "South Asian Islam" pp. 7-9 and 9-10.

<sup>12</sup>Evidence for this process in the British colonies like Malaysia is found in William Roff's work. See William R Roff, "Patterns of Islamization in Malaysia, 1890s-1990s: Exemplars, Institutions, and Vectors," in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 9 (2), 1998, 21-228



2. Loss of *ashraf* political power narrowed the actual gulf between the *ashrafs* and the *ajlafs*. The British aided this process by identifying subjects under religious categories such as Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims. Thus the *ashrafs* and the *ajlafs* were statistically clubbed together, just as the *high-low caste* Hindus were clubbed together. The statistical swelling of Muslim numbers achieved something significant. It caused a powerful movement called *shuddhi*.<sup>13</sup> With the coming of the British secular democratic ideals first began to show signs of appearing. Appearance of democratic ideals convinced the elite among Hindus and Muslims that their numerical strength was an important criterion for political participation and power. The high caste Hindus saw Muslim numbers swelling as a result of the British census and interpreted this to mean that Muslims were increasing in power. They therefore, launched *shuddhi* campaign. Significantly, the revivalist *arya samaj* (Fellowship of *aryans*) led this movement. A Gujarati (West Indian) Brahmin Swami Daynand Saraswati (1824-1883) was the founder of the *samaj*. Swami Shradhananda, his disciple started the actual *shuddhi* campaign in 1923. *Arya samaj and shuddhi* concentrated on the recovery of *aryadharma* (Aryan religion with its caste

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<sup>13</sup> A movement led by the high-caste Hindus who sought to reconvert the *ajlafs* so as to re-integrate them into the Hindu caste system and thereby increase their power in the politically fragile and fragmented context.

system), which meant re-conversion and reintegration of common Muslims back into the caste hierarchy.

The *ashrafs* reacted to this. Their political rule was taken away from them and now their power base, which was centered on the great number of the Indian converts to Islam, was threatened by *shuddhi*.<sup>14</sup>

Mawdudi's notion of One sovereign God was part of the *ashraf* attempt to Islamize *ajlaf* and reform of the plurality of religious visions within Islam of the subcontinent that had according to him, compromised on the unitive vision of Islam. The popular Islam was too democratic a system for the elite to be comfortable. The multiplicity of religious routes was perceived as sources of weakening of elite power and influence. This meant that the majorities of Indian Muslims remained notionally linked to the elite or 'orthodox' institutions, but they preserved and frequented the 'heterodox' institutions where the *pirs* (dead saints) and *mujavirs* (mediums) exercised immense power over the masses.

Assertion of the sovereignty of One God one law crystallised in this context. The continuance of the heterodox institutions is evidence of the fact that Islamization never fully replaced the 'heterodox routes'. What it succeeded in achieving was to create a new sense of conceptual and uniform religious identity among the Indian Muslims. The Muslim masses after Islamization became aware of the essentials of Islamic

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 10-11.

beliefs and practices as defined by the elite. The essential content of such a reformation was the focus on one God one law. The *ashrafs* however, allowed the 'heterodox' routes to exist within Islam in practice and often themselves crossed over to them in crises.<sup>15</sup>

The analysis above may lead one to think of elite Hindus and Muslims as oppressors, but that would be far from truth. Every religious community contains subgroups that are essentially incompatible with the dominant subgroup. The analysis above showed that the dominant subgroup creates conditions for the so-called poor, marginalised, and oppressed subgroups to exercise their 'heterodox' distinctive both in practice and beliefs in order that their needs are met.

In my review of the book below I attempt to show that distress or suffering is not just a phenomenon which dogs the poor, the marginalised and the

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<sup>15</sup> At the political plane the model showing how sub-groups continue into larger and more dominant entities can also be demonstrated using examples from works done on North Africa, Middle East and Turkey. Space would not permit a detailed discussion on this here. An example of Palestine may however be briefly cited. It has been stated that Palestinian identity is complex. It involves Palestinian local identity, pan-Arab-pan Islamic identity. Pan-Arabism was the dominant entity and local Palestinian elite saw it as the way to preserve their local identity against the Zionist challenge. This happened in the general background of the fall of the Arab government in Damascus in 1920 and the defining of Palestinian borders by the British. See *Palestine Documents*, ed. Zafarul-Islam Khan (New Delhi: Pharos and Institute of Islamic and Arab Studies. 1998) and Yezid Sayigh, *Armed struggle and the Search for State: the Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993*, (Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies and Clarendon Press, 1997)



oppressed subgroups within the dominant subgroup, but that the dominant subgroup also experiences distress and attempts to address such distress through ritual, caste structures etc.

## **Management of Distress by the Dominant Subgroups**

***Managing Distress*** is the result of papers presented in Toulouse, France (31 August-3 September 1994) in the 13<sup>th</sup> European conference of modern south Asian studies on 'therapeutic cults'.<sup>16</sup> The basic organising theme of the book centres on the psychological phenomenon of 'communal distress'. While distress of most kinds manifest themselves in ways that can be observed and described, the world of inner feelings that cause external manifestations however remain remote from ones standing outside the environment of distress. The book attempts to make an instrumental use of psychology and religious cults in order to understand the phenomenon of distress. In other words the book attempts to answer the question-how do the selected South Asian religious communities deal with the 'distress syndrome'?

Central to the organising theme is the assumption that religious communities manage and manifest distress essentially through rituals. This

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<sup>16</sup> *Managing Distress: Possession and Therapeutic Cults in South Asia: La prise en charge de l'affliction possession et cultes therapeutiques en Asie du Sud*, ed. Marine Carrin, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999).

assumption has certain ramifications for how one must view caste Hinduism. Much of the Dalit writings and also writings of the so-called champions of dalitism in the subcontinent unfortunately demonise caste Hindus and Hinduism. It presents a very self-centered perspective of caste and caste Hindus. It does so perhaps because:

1. There is an excessive self-centredness among the Dalit writers; a sort of pathological suffering complex. Such a complex blocks or inhibits individual or communal dalit sensitivity towards others distress. For instance, I recently came across a poster published by National campaign on dalit human rights - 10 dec 1998-14 April 1999. Some of the slogans are as follows.

- \* We demand freedom from caste bondage of 260 million dalits of Asia
- \* Dalits, a people, a culture a history
- \* Dalit rights are human rights
- \* Let us caste out caste

One might say much by way of comments on these slogans, but just a few questions might suffice for now. Will freedom from caste really lead to freedom from caste? What about subgroups within the dalits? Will not subgroups within the dalits organise themselves into a new caste hierarchy? What guarantee is there for freedom from caste?

2. The dalits seem to be unwilling to consider that Brahmanic and Hindutva forces they are

struggling against are in fact made up of living breathing individuals who are as prone to distress as the Dalits.

3. The framework for understanding Dalit-Caste Hindu interaction is supplied by the Marxist-socialist model. Their approach, for instance, is sadly devoid of absolute lack of awareness about plural ways of looking at the caste Hindus. Even when the Dalit writers outline religious sources, they do so in an attempt to show how caste Hindu religious establishment 'enslaves', 'oppresses', 'subjugates' 'co-opts' dalit spirituality and so on. There is hardly any attempt to understand the Hindu psyche sympathetically.

Perhaps in the context of the Indian subcontinent the value of the book under-view is not really in the detailed scholarly examination of particular societies, cults, customs, rituals, psycho-religious therapies and healing practices, but rather in isolating the central principle-**that distress is managed by religious communities through rituals** and the application of this principle to Caste Hindu-dalit interactions.

Fear of evil and awareness of impurity and evil found pierced within beings stirs up a complex psychological response- obsession against impurity. This obsession result in certain observable rituals and beliefs described by ideas such as pollution, untouchability, and caste.



Far from being a tool for oppression of the dalits, caste and the ideas of untouchability and pollution are first and foremost, manifestations of inner distress against awareness and experience of evil present within the caste Hindu psyche. Its primary focus is on individual and community's own need for purity and not deliberate and premeditated oppression of the dalits.

## Appendix I

### Case I

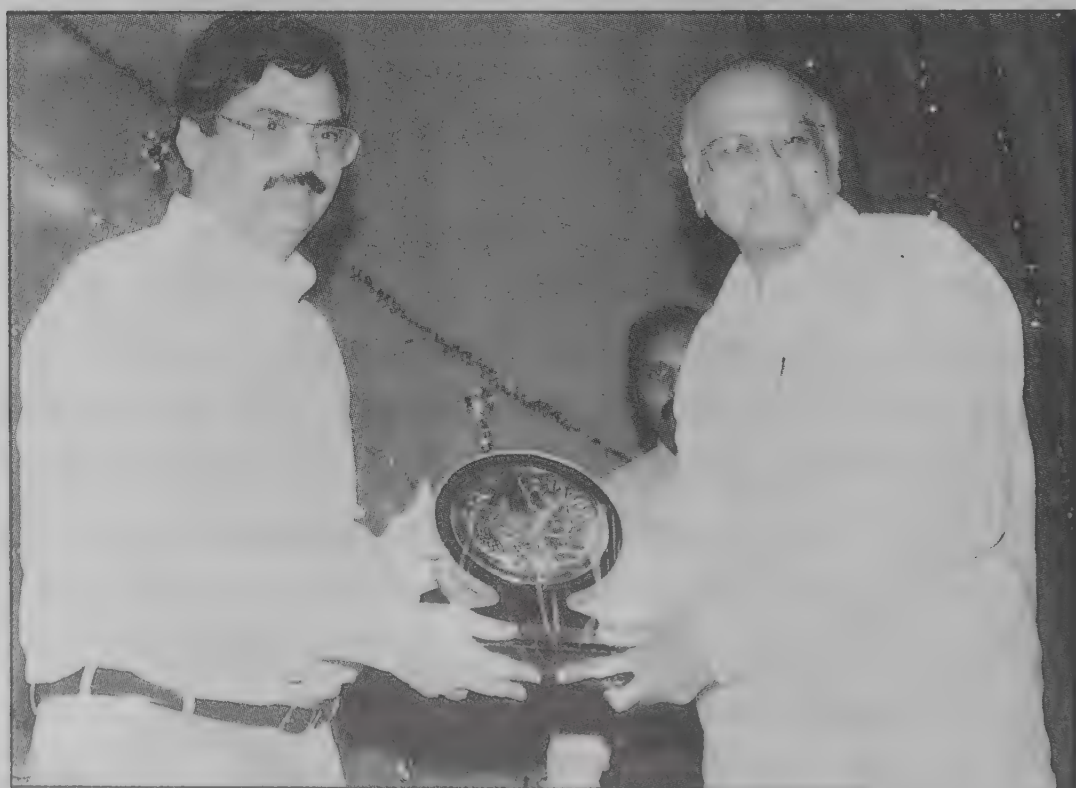
On campus C the graves are of two saints who were brothers. There is an unpaid *mujavir* whose brother acts as caretaker of the sacred site. Great numbers of illiterate come from outside the campus on the festival days (illiteracy rate of the city being 85%). The *mujavir* experiences ecstasy on celebration days. He divines sources and cures of illness, promises remedies for personal difficulties, and gives flowers imbued with impersonal supernatural Powers. Among the crowds on one festival evening, two Muslim strangers appeared. Their clothing and bearing showed they were educated. They did not approach the graves nor consult the ecstatic but stood apart. They covered their heads with handkerchiefs, recited the *fatiha*, and went away.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Mid India Practice of Toleration, p. 16



*Presentation of the Mementos  
in remembrance of the  
Seminar on Interreligious Dialogue*





*Chief Guests discussing about the Seminar*



*From the Audience Side*



# **ROLE OF RELIGION AND VALUE SYSTEM IN PROMOTING PEACE AND COMMUNAL HARMONY**

**Sri A. Krishna Murthy**

*(Retd.) Deputy Commissioner Labour*

Today, peace and harmony are on the top of the nation's agenda. All institutions, all platforms echo, with one voice, the demand for harmony between various communities, castes and regional linguistic and other interest groups. In the absence of harmony, all energy, money and attention is wasted, which are put on any effort.

In the present situation, the world is faced with many problems and each one of those is considered to emanate from the loss of some moral, human, social or spiritual values. Much of the turmoil and suffering in our world is due to one or the other kind of disharmony. Every person, every family, every field in the society, every community, every state and nation is experiencing stress and strain because of disharmony.

Some feel tormented because of disharmony between their emotions and intellect, desires and judgement, beliefs and behaviour or views and values. Because of this inner disharmony, they suffer from sleepless nights, restless moods or constant stress and the consequent physical disorders or psycho-somatic disease.

Others suffer mental agony because of disharmony in the relationships among the family members - father and son, husband and wife, brothers and sisters. Even if one single member feels this, the whole family suffers because of him.

Disharmony among neighbours make one's life difficult and joyless. Disharmony in the relationship between students and teachers, may spoil the educational atmosphere and may lead to indiscipline and unruly behaviour on the part of the students. Once the schools and colleges were treated as temples, because the education given there, was making the students, living diamonds. But today's education system, college and university campuses are showing us the battle fields.

Similarly, lack of harmony in an Administration may lead to lack of co-operation, lack of co-ordination, delay, inefficiency and many other maladies. Disharmony at the work place may kill the team-spirit and may cause emotional turmoil and make one's job a mill-stone round one's neck and lead to outbursts. Similarly, in every area of life, today disharmony is omnipresent.

Disharmony may manifest itself in the form of communal discord and strife and may lead to riots and destruction. It may keep law and order situation in many towns and cities severely tense and may put the whole legislative, governmental, administrative and judicial machinery under great strain and may give strong feeling of insecurity to the citizens.

In the field of politics, disharmony is resulting in political instability, absence of stable government and a state of deorientation in law and order. It may make a nation weak, torn by internal strife.

Disharmony may also raise its ugly head in the form of racial trends, gender-discrimination, caste-conflict or class-conflagration and thus generates social upheavals.

Disharmony at the international level may also find expression in the form of suspicion and fear, or anger and vengeance between two countries and may lead to manufacture and stock piling of deadly weapons of man-scale destruction. Nations are spending billions of dollars on weapons. The use of these weapons may bring doom to the whole world.

When men lead a life in disharmony with nature and with other forms of life, then the result is ecological imbalance and environmental pollution. Disharmony with Nature and creatures may lead to a great catastrophe of unknown dimensions. When man ruins the environment, the environment rebounds on him with full fury so as to return to its state of harmony, and in this process, there is a deluge and destruction on a global scale. We are observing the floods, earthquakes and famine that are showing this destruction.

The disharmony caused in one sector of the society affects all the sectors. Because of disharmony only, the peace has vanished from human lives, society



and nation, and peace has become an international problem. Harmony is the prime value from what has been said above, it should be clear that, harmony is a prime value, for due to its absence, even the whole human civilisation may be lost either due to nuclear catastrophe or through worldwide environmental calamities or through racial, ethnic, regional, linguistic or other kinds of strife. These are due to disharmony in international intercommunal relations or in man's relations or in man's relation with Nature and ecosphere. So, Harmony becomes the first priority because the very existence or mankind is threatened by forces of disharmony. The present situation may be compared to the critical condition of a patient who is suffering from various diseases and is kept in oxygen. The patient has been admitted for surgery, but he has high B.P. and blood-sugar and certain other ailments that threaten the very survival of the patient. Similarly, even if harmony is not the most fundamental or most important value, it is presently to be given a high priority, because, without it, human kind is in danger of being lost.

Harmony seems to be one single value, yet, in truth, it is the group name of a set of values. For "Harmony" has love, unity, concord, amicability, variability, friendliness, spirit of co-existence, tolerance etc., without these values, there cannot be an enduring and holistic harmony.

**What Actually Harmony Means :** The word "Harmony" implies co-ordination, agreeability and a pleasing blend of diverse colours, diverse musical notes

or diverse designs, It does not imply negation of diversity. All the colours of a rainbow are different and yet their pattern is harmonious. In an orchestra, different musical instruments are used and yet a happy blend of the tunes and tones of all, creates a concordant tune and has the harmonious effect of music. Similarly, people may live in different parts of the globe, have different colours of their skin and different facial features, yet they can live with a spirit of amity and in a State of Harmony. Definitely, there is a difference between one and the other, but harmony means the blend of values, habits of personality. Harmony means unity in diversity and agreement in disagreement.

**The Cause of disharmony :** The negative forces that cause disharmony, discord or conflict are *hatred, anger, enmity, intolerance, greed, selfishness etc.* If we see the problems, we are facing today, the root cause of all kinds of disharmony is *Man*. He is ignorant of his real identity and his basic relationship with others. So, the disharmony in his mind and relations is arising. Presently, the man is identifying himself with his race, region, language etc. By this reason, Communal disharmony is created.

**Spirituality can promote peace and communal harmony :** Spirituality offers techniques of peace and self-empowerment that can save man from destructive habits and conflicts and sorrows. Spirituality is for the discovery of the non-physical, non-material self, the soul, which is different from this physical body. The soul is the driving power. The soul is the living entity, eternal and immortal whereas the

body is mortal. Spirituality enables us to journey into the inner space of the self. So, inner-disharmony is vanished.

Without knowing the self, man is unable to understand his true relationship with others and his place in the scheme of things. Through spirituality man identifies himself as soul, child of the Supreme and every one as his brother soul. Then, there is harmony among families and neighbours.

Spirituality is for understanding the meaning and the purpose of life, for knowing and purifying the motives behind actions, and for implementing principles and moral norms that give high quality to life and inner feelings. Then social harmony is achieved.

The forms of spirituality are positive thinking, emotional stability, converting harmful tendencies into constructive energy. Thus, the harmony between man and nature is established.

Spirituality promotes values like humility, compassion, forgiveness, non-violence, calmness of mind, tolerance, self-control, truth and greater wisdom. These are the essential values for a human to establish the harmony.

**Conclusion:** Today, science has developed so much. Now man is able to fly like a bird in the sky and swim like a fish in water, but he is unable to live as a human with humans. Here, spirituality has a major work to do. People are taking interest in their physical, mental



and social aspects of life. But they are ignoring the spiritual aspect. Because of this values are vanishing from the life and ultimately, negative forces are taking the place of values and virtues.

There are 7 basic values in self. Wisdom, purity, peace, love, prosperity, happiness and power. These are attained through self-awareness, which in turn transform one's personality. The blend of these values is Harmony, a single value.

If the sun light passes through a prism, then the inherent 7 colours are merged. In the same way, through self-awareness, the values are merged.

If we transform self, then the mind is clear, tranquil and alert, the body is disease-free and strong, the relationships are faithful and loving, the society is organised just and peaceful.

Here, we have to quote Rabindranath Tagore:

*Where the head is held high  
Where the mind is without fear  
Where the knowledge is free  
Where the words come from depths of truths  
Where the world is not broken down by narrow  
domestic walls  
In to that heaven of freedom, my Father, Let  
my country Awake.*

Not only our country, let our world Awake.

# THREEFOLD UNIVERSE AND BEYOND

By

**K. Eswara Rao & K. Srinivasa Rao**

The goal of mankind is knowledge, not pleasure. Bharatiya Vidya is the ancient para vidya (Spiritual knowledge and wisdom) characterized by knowledge coming from inside to discover the "Self" by taking the cover off his own soul. It tells us about infinite and eternal as opposed to the limited and conditional western knowledge coming from outside. The vedas of the hoary past teach us how to search beyond the known to know the unknowable by transcending the limitations of the material world and to experience the limitless, infinite and eternal Brahman, which is by definition *Satyam* (truth), *jnanam* (knowledge) and *anantam* (infinite). Meditation on mantras of profound philosophical import are prescribed for the gradual unfoldment of spiritual knowledge. The *Gayatri Mantra* and the class of mantras belonging to *Gayatri Chandas* (metre) are characterized by the Sanskrit words *dhimahi* (to meditate) *vidmahe* (on the known) and *Prachodayat* (to be inspired), which are common to all the mantras in vacating the grace of personal gods to inspire unfoldment of spiritual faculties. The *Gayatri Mantra* chanted in daily meditational practices is supreme as it meditates upon the Divine light of that adorable Sun of spiritual consciousness. It is an all comprehensive spring-board for solving the mystery of one's own consciousness as it transcends the triad of the material

world, namely matter, mind and energy factors, which are fundamental factors operating not only on the animate world and cosmos but also on the inanimate which is endowed with a consciousness of its own according to modern science. The unification of consciousness is at a deeper level than what is manifest. Supramental consciousness at the soul level is still spiritual and at the farthest reach of modern science.

The story goes that gods, men and demons (actually three types of men - godly, human and ungodly with the triad of *satvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic* temperaments predominating respectively in each), all descendants of *Prajapati*, the progenitor *Brahma*, once went to *Prajapati* to complain that the vedas are too verbose for them and that it be made concise. He gave them the impersonal *Gayatri manta* - *tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyoyonah prachodayat*. After reciting the *Mantra* for a while they found it to be too lengthy to be recited. They went back to *Prajapati* with a request that the *Vedas* may be made terser than the *Mantra*. Then *Prajapati* gave them the three *vyahritis* (spheres of existence) symbolic of the whole gamut of triads representing the gross, subtle and energy spheres of existence. They are respectively *bhuh*, *buwah* and *suvah*. After sometime they came back to ask for a more pithic form of the vedas than the three *vyahritis*. Then he said "Recite Om alone. That is the essence of all that is given in the vedas." It is a story that signifies the quintessence of the seed syllable *Om* (*bija mantra*) encompassing all the spiritual powers of the *vyahritis* of the *Gayatri*,



made more potent when recited with the *Mantra*. The truth lies in showing that the triad of letters A U M in Om, the triad of *vyahrities* and the *tripada* (three limbed) *Gayatri* depict the manifest as well as unmanifest universe and hold the key transcendently to the higher levels of consciousness.

The letters of A U M in Om are : time-wise, past, present and future; cosmic order-wise, creation, sustenance and dissolution; consciousness-wise, waking, dream and deep-sleep states; existence-wise, physical, mental and energy states; and these letters also are known to represent the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara and prakriti qualified by sattva, rajas and tamas, according to the scriptures. Einstein wanted to read the thoughts of god. 'Om' is the answer. It is the external aspect of the thought of God, the seed-force that sprouts and expands into the universe, the cosmic ideation, thematrix of all ideas, the first manifestation of his omniscience, and as a vehicle of thought each letter is a form of consciousness. The unity of cosmic consciousness in the diversity of names and forms of the universe is 'Om'. As a seed of spiritual consciousness it germinates and grows when sown in the right soil and nurtured by meditation. The utterance of 'Om' covers the whole process of articulation. 'A' arising from throat and produced without touching any part of tongue or palate is the symbol of creation; 'U' is symbolic of sustenance rolling from the very root to the end of the sounding board of the mouth; and 'M' being the last sound in the series produced by the closed lips is symbolic of tapering into dissolution. Thus 'Om'

symbolises the whole range of words that encompass creation, sustenance and dissolution of the whole universe. The phenomenon of sound production at the individual level and the phenomenon of cosmic order are both covered by the seed syllable 'Om'.

The utterance of 'Om' is like the drawn peal of the gong which starts volumiously and tapers to a vanishing point, that is, it reaches the subtlest, the all pervading entity, the infinite, the eternal. The loudness at the beginning is akin to the sound 'A' in pronouncing 'Om' representing the gross around's, while the vanishing point at the end represents the silence of Brahman. Thus 'Om' represents *Brahman* immanent (*Saguna*) and Brahman transcendent (*nirguna*) as well. Gong and wick lamp are must in every Hindu temple. They represent symbolically the sacredness of the gross tapering into the minutes of the minute (sound, light or mind for that matter) representing *Brahman*. These are all intended for the identification of the individual self with the supreme Being, which is the direct way to liberation.

The Mandukya Upanishad elaborated the relation between the individual self and the cosmic self. *Visva*, *Taijasa* and *Prajna* are the names by which the Self is known in three states : waking, dream and sleep. They are not distinct but one and the same self that appears as three. The corresponding cosmic forms of the self are given the names, *Virat*, *Hiranyagarbha* and *Iswara* for the purpose of realising nonduality. The nondual reality is *turiya*, the fourth state identified as

the infinite silence or the *amatra kalam* (time without any sound of the letters 'A U M' on Om meditation). For meditation, the waking state ego is superimposed upon the 'A' sound of 'Om', the dream state on 'U' sound and the deep sleep state on the 'M' sound. Each later state is subtler than the previous one. When 'M' is pronounced, the letters 'A' and 'U' merge themselves into the sound 'M'. When the sound Om is chanted the sounds 'A U' seem to arise from 'M'. When one 'Om' chant is ended and before the meditator can pronounce the next 'Om', there is a moment of silence, the *amatra kalam*, comparable to the tapering sound of the gong and the tapering light of the wick into nothingness. The contents of this small moment, however negligible in duration, comprise the contents of the infinite. At that moment our mind and intellect become steady, sharp and single-pointed. In that moment is the one transcendental Self beyond the three states, which is "pure Awareness, where is the cessation of the manifold, which is nondual, clam and blissful."

The *vyahrities* : *bhuh*, *bhuvah* and *suvah* (spheres of existence) represent the entire galaxy of triads in the universe to signify the all pervasiveness of *Brahman*. The triad represents symbolically the material (*bhuh* with *Agni*, the fire god as presiding deity), the subtle mental (*buvah* with *Vayu*, the wind god as the presiding deity) and the cosmic energy of outer space (*suvah*, with *Surya* the sun god as the presiding deity). That is the fundamental triad pervading the entire material universe. Mechanically speaking, it ranges from a varist watch (Material, maker and the



energy that runs it) to an aeroplane (material, pilot and fuel). In the human body, there is the physical body, the mind and the *prana* which keeps it running.

The particular branch of yoga involved in Gayatri Upasana is Mantra Yoga, which is essentially a technique of spiritual unfoldment through the practice of *japa*. The basic doctrine is that the tangible universe is made up of different kinds of vibrations, energies and consciousness. Intangible elements of the universe like thoughts and emotions have also a material basis, using the word materials in its widest sense. It may be argued that if thought is not matter how can there be mind body interactions to keep a person in good health or ill health? Harmony between body and mind keeps the person at "ease", the lack of which throws him into "dis ease". The relation of the subtle vibrations of the *vyahritis* with the fundamental vibration of nature as a whole (*Prakriti*) is like that of leaves and branches to the tree.

The fundamental vibration is *avyaktam* (undifferentiated) from which everything that is made up of atoms and molecules comes out. *Avyaktam* is the undifferentiated electromagnetic field of modern science. Condensed electromagnetic fields are the elementary particles like electrons (- vly charged) and protons (+ vly charged).

An ancient teacher defined *avyaktam* as the equilibrium of the triad of forces namely *sattva* (purity, goodness and harmony), *rajas* (motives, desire and

activity) and *tamas* (ignorance and darkness). *Tamas*, the lowest force is of attraction and *rajas*, a little higher is that of repulsion. When *tamas* and *rajas* are under the control of the highest, namely *sattva*, there is equilibrium and there is no creation. When one or the other of the lower forces gets stronger than the other there is change and motion an evolution. The forces tend to project outward. The universe slowly comes out in the form of waves and vibrations to produce the manifest. The manifest universe is threefold in the form of the physical (*sthula*), subtle (*sukshma*) and causal (*Karana*). When the universe quiets down and remains in a state of equilibrium it is called *Kalpa*.

According to Sankhya of Capital, the whole of the universe is built upon the same plan as one single man. In the microcosm there is mind, intelligence and egoism. So also in the macrocosm, there is a cosmic mind, cosmic intelligence and a universal egoism. At the cosmic level these vibratory movements in the cosmic mind are a part of *prakriti*. At the individual level, the vibrations or *chitta vriti* create imbalances between *rajas* and *tamas* as related to *sattva* (unsettled state of mind) all the which are inherent in *Prakriti*. Each one of us is a part of that cosmic consciousness. This realization frees the individual soul from the fetters of the triad-ridden material world to regain our natural rights of omnipotence of omniscience.

# INTEGRATE SPIRITUALITY WITH DAILY LIFE FOR TRUE HAPPINESS

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**All of us Seek mental happiness.** The American constitution mentions Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness as fundamental rights for its citizens. All progress achieved through modern sciences and technology is expected to help mankind to lead a peaceful life with happiness. But what we see today are increasing cases of suicide even among teenagers, widespread hate campaign, violence, more people seeking psychiatric help to overcome depression and all sorts of unhealthy addictions, strained marital relationships etc. Why the conditions are so alarming, making the pursuit of happiness an elusive one for most people? If we have to know the real reasons for this unhappy state, we have to look inward. Nobody except the individual can guarantee his happiness.

**Happiness is a state of mind.** One can be surrounded by a sea of misfortune, but still can have hope and inner strength. So the key to happiness lies in controlling your thoughts. Then actions triggered by thoughts will automatically be controlled. Over generations seers and saints all over the world have shown that the spiritual path alone can help us to achieve total control over our mind. If we make spirituality as the main basis of our daily life, we can



move towards true happiness. If we link our happiness to events and things that are external to us and which are not under our control, we will find happiness an elusive dream only.

While Spirituality is a vast concept, in my humble way I will define it as identifying ourselves with our creator and acting as per his directions and seeking his help and guidance to lead our lives in this world. Once we mentally accept the above definition as valid, then we will see God in us and others around us. Not only that. We will start seeing the manifestation of God in all objects whether animate or inanimate around us. No sane person would like to destroy himself. In view of our above way of looking at ourselves we will not attempt to destroy nature and its beauty. All our negative qualities like avarice, greed, envy, lust, selfishness can be easily discarded thro' the above spiritual awakening. We will enjoy true freedom from confusion and complications.

The great Tamil saint Valluvar said that to get detached from negative thoughts which are responsible for our unhappiness, one must get attached to the creator. The Christian scripture says "I cried upto Thee and Thou hath healed me". Therefore total surrender to God is essential to bring spirituality into our daily life. A prayer in Rigveda says "Lead me from darkness to life." Whatever we do or think, we have to dedicate it to God and do it as per his directions. Once we see God in us, our behaviour and action will fall in line with what God tells us to do. Just like God treats all of us

with equal love, our hearts will become large enough to show kindness to all in this world. Hatred is like a container holding acid. As acid damages the container more than the object on which it is thrown, hatred also damages the holder more than the person hated. So when we stop hating others, we are the real beneficiary and are protected more than others.

God knows what we need and what is good for us. He will give us that. This can be realised from our many experiences of the past. When something that happened not as per our expectations, we thought at that time it was bad for us and we could not have realised why it had happened. We simply cursed our bad luck at the time. Later on after many months or even years, looking back in retrospect we indeed realise that what has happened was good for us. If we accept the above position that God knows better than we know what we want and he will give us that, we won't face disappointments. We will accept things as they happen to us.

One of God's commandments is we follow the path of right and do the things that are right in the eyes of God. Right things in God's eye are those things that do not hurt any of his children. If we follow this right path as shown by God, we will never be tempted to harm any of God's creation which include all the fellow human beings on earth, nature, animal kingdom etc. A mother loves all her children equally irrespective of the health, physical appearance, intelligence etc. of the children. God also loves all his creations equally.

When we identify ourselves with God during our spiritual journey in day to day life, we will also not differentiate people on the basis of race, colour etc. We will treat everybody equally.

As per Gita we have to perform our wordly duties with sincerity, devotion and commitment. But we should leave the results to the wisdom of God. As God had sent us to this world as his children, it is our duty to fulfill his wishes just like it is the duty of every child to fulfill his parents' wishes. What is God's wish? His wish is to make all his children joyful, happy and live in peace. Let all of our deeds and thoughts go to fulfill his wishes.

Make two lists. In the first list add at the end of every day before going to bed the good things you have done to others during the day. These good things can even be a small kind gesture like helping an old man to cross the road. In the other list add at the end of the day any good things that happended to you during the day. You will find when the first list grows, automatically the second list also grows. You have to take care of the first list. The second list will take care of itself.



# MEANING AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN INDIA

Rev. Dr. A. Suresh

## Introduction :

India in its entire history never was a country with a single religion. It is always a land of many religions. In its continuous search for the Absolute, India has not only given birth to several major religions but also accommodated number of world religions. According to the religious census of 1991 there are 672.5 million Hindus, 95.2 million Muslims, 18.8 million Christians, 16.2 million Sikhs, 6.3 million Buddhists and 3.3 million Jains in India.<sup>1</sup> Religious pluralism in Indian context simply means democracy among religions, in which beauty is understood as unity in diversity.

Hence mutual understanding, respect for one another's interest, recognition of inter-dependence, admiration of diversity are essential in a pluralistic society for mutual growth and prosperity. The way we deal with the fact of plurality with admiration, respect and love leading to a happy living of various communities is what we call *pluralism*. The foundation for this unity and harmony is seen in ancient Vedic literature, where it is said, "**Ekam Sat Vipra**

***Bahudha Vadanti***" - 'Truth is one, but the wise speak of it variously" (Rg. Veda I. 164-46).

## **Interreligious Dialogue In India:**

### *i. Basic Unity*

Because different religions are born in different times, against different background, one religion may differ from another in their thought pattern, religious expression, symbols and rituals. But at the bottom there is always a tendency for unity in their quest for something beyond. Besides, all of them try to find answers to the questions commonly raised by everyone, namely, the existence of God, meaning of life and the final destiny of man. Hence in matters pertains to religious experience, ***samanvaya*** - 'harmony' is always possible between opposites on the basis of ***samana adhikarana*** - 'common foundation'.

### *ii. Christian Approach:*

Religions can mutually enrich themselves only when there is a living dialogue among themselves, one faith encountering another faith, openness to critical evaluation of beliefs and practices, interpreting religious symbols and sharing of spiritual experiences with one another. Realizing this fact, Christians, living in a multi-religious society like India, acknowledge and appreciate the good things that are found in other religious traditions. Besides, they feel at home in the national and religious traditions of the people and promote whatever is true and just, whatever is holy and worth living.

In Indian context, interreligious dialogue can become more meaningful and relevant only when it is motivated by the three-fold objectives: 1. Harmony at All Levels, 2. Spiritual Fellowship, and 3. Cooperative Action. Once again these objectives themselves become valid reason for dialogical relationship among the people of various religious traditions.

## **Harmony At All Levels:**

### *i. Indian Tradition:*

Ancient and medieval India was known for religious tolerance and nonviolence. "*Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides*", says Rig Veda. The Hindu mind considered truth as many-faceted. Truth has to be gathered from different points of view of Reality because no system of philosophy or religion could claim monopoly over the whole truth. Hence pluralism and diversity did not pose any serious problem. On the contrary, the integral approach to all forms of pluralism made life smooth and peaceful. '**Sarvodaya**' meaning "uplift of all" was the common dictum practiced in Indian soil.

### *ii. Religious Fanaticism:*

Religious fanaticism, and hateful intolerance are contrary to the very nature and the purpose of every religion. It simply points to the fact that religion can be used either as a means to build up a harmonious society or can be misused to promote ill-feelings, hatred and unjust aggression. The reason is that in a multi-religious



society, every religion wants to stress its individuality and at times the prevailing competition between religions leads to the systematic suppressing of one by the other. Every major religion, when it encounters another religion, either it wants to swallow it up or annihilate or marginalize it. The typical example is that when Hinduism encountered Bhuddism, it absorbed certain good elements from it and then exiled it. Today it is flourishing in other Asian countries.

### iii. *Religious Communalism:*

Often religion alone is not the root cause of Communal conflicts. But religion is used as a powerful instrument by a group of people who wants to play with religious sentiments of the people to uphold their social, economic and political interests. This is the new phenomena in India today. Hence religious communalism can be briefly described as an indiscriminate mixing of religion with politics - as an element in the game of power. A group of people become communal when they feel that because they belong to the same religion they also have the same economic, social and political interests; that these are different from those of other religious believers, and that these need to be defended as such.<sup>2</sup> Hence it is often argued that religious conflicts that are based on faith commitment, doctrinal differences, methods of worship, belief systems etc. should not be mixed with the communal violence triggered off by a struggle for political power, economic welfare and social status between two or more faith communities. Thus, we come across two types of communalism in India. One is purely

religious and the other is misuse of religions to uphold the interest of a particular community. Hence we are called to work for 'Harmony at all Levels', religious, social, economic and political.

## **Spiritual Fellowship:**

### *i. Bhakti Tradition in India:*

It is in *Bhakti Marga* the "I-Thou" relationship between God and man is graphically expressed. Hence it is very popular and most loved means of attaining communion with God. According to *Bhakti Marga*. The spiritual journey of the soul has four stages: prayer, worship, contemplation, and mystical union. **Prarthana**, the Sanskrit word for prayer means petition - an ardent request for some favour from God. The vedic word **yajna** for worship stands for offering something to God. It denotes devotee's self offering or self sacrifice. Worship purifies the mind and shifts the focus of man's activities from self to the Divine. This takes the soul nearer to God. This way of approaching God with single-minded devotion is known as contemplation. The Sanskrit word for contemplation is **upasana** which literally means 'sitting near' (the deity). Finally the soul is absorbed into the Bliss of the Lord which is known as mystical union.

### *ii. Religious Teachings in India :*

Hinduism suggests certain essential qualities necessary for spiritual perfection: single-minded devotion to the Lord, good will towards all beings,

uprightness, friendliness, compassion, freedom from attachment and egoism, self-control etc. (Bhagavadgita 12:11-20).

Jainism recommends same virtues, in relation to nonviolence (**a-himsa**) and compassion for spiritual purification and total liberation: 'For the sake of the splendor, honour and glory of this life; for the sake of birth, death and final liberation, for the removal of pain, man acts sinfully towards the earth or causes others to act so, or allows others to act so. This deprives him of happiness and perfect wisdom.... He who knows these causes of sin relating to the earth, is called a reward-knowing sage" (*Acharabga Sutra* I, 1,2).

Buddhism proposes eightfold noble ways which gives insight and wisdom and leads to serenity, perfection, enlightenment and **Nirvana**. They are: Right views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Pursuits, Right Efforts, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Sikhism proposes five kinds of vows for perfection in moral life, namely, non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, abstinence from sexuality and abstinence from greed. The Sikh ethics teach that work, worship and charity should dominate one's complete life. And self-reliance is the greatest enemy of God-realization and it manifests itself in lust, anger, greed materialism and pride.<sup>3</sup>

Also in Zoroastrianism, spiritual perfection here



on earth and the ultimate destiny after-life depend upon ethical behaviour "False brings an age-long punishment and Truth leads on to fuller higher life" (*Yasna* 30:11). Zoraster preached good thought (*Humata*), good word (*Hukhta*) and good deed (*Harshata*) to be the essential virtues or duties for every religious man.<sup>4</sup>

iii. *Christian Understanding:*

The above mentioned teachings of different religions, which uphold the moral, ethical and spiritual perfection of a seeker of God, go hand in hand with the teachings of Jesus Christ found in the Gospel. Spiritual perfection is a state of blessedness, joy, love and communion with the Lord. The whole sermon on the mount is nothing but an invitation for such state of life and communion with the Lord through moral, ethical and religious behaviour. Again, the concepts like, human bondage, total self-surrender, freedom through divine grace and final bliss are common to many religions of Indian origin. To a greater extent they correspond to the Christian understanding of freedom from sin and final fulfillment. This openness will strengthen the mutual bond, spiritual fellowship and collaboration between religions to march towards one and the same God Who wants all men to be saved.

**Cooperative Action Among Believers:**

i. *Dialogue of Action:*

The poor and the oppressor, who are in constant struggle to defend their rights and dignity, are

in need of our support and help. Lack of proper nourishment, unemployment, exploitation at various levels intensify the poverty in India. Religious leaders can certainly come together to fight against all kinds of oppression in respect to their religious teaching, namely, love of God and love of neighbour. Dialogue, then, is not a matter of talking but action. It is an openness to share one's material and spiritual resources with others who are in great struggle for justice and liberation.

## ii. *Caste System:*

Secondly caste discrimination is one of the major factors in India. It has pushed a section of the society into background and denied them even the basic human rights. The sad thing is that the caste discrimination is observed in India even at political level. Christian dalits do not get the privileges given to other dalits for the simple reason that they are converted from Hinduism. Of late, number of dalit organizations and social action groups have emerged to fight for the rights of the dalits community. In this situation, Interreligious dialogue can initiate the people of all faith communities to fight against the common enemy that affects the society.

## iii. *Faith Commitment:*

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. It is this good news Jesus went about preaching by his life, word and action. "The spirit of

the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to set free the oppressed and to announce the day of the Lord" (Lk.4:18-19). Catholics in India, continue this mission of Christ to do away with the unjust social order in whichever way and in whatever form it appears. In a multi-religious society this liberative work should become a common venture of all believers motivated by the religious, moral and social teaching of their respective religions.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

By interreligious dialogue we come to know that all religions are pilgrims in search of the Absolute. Since God revealed Himself in various ways and forms, He can be approached through different means. The whole humanity takes part in the same divine essence because it is created in God's image. God being the origin and end of humanity, the ultimate goal of all religions is nothing but the establishment of God's reign of love peace and brotherhood. Hence the vision of building up a 'New India' calls for a joint effort by all religious communities in India.

1. Manorama Yearbook 1996, 31st Year of Publication, Kottayam, India., p.461.
2. See Bipin Chandra, "Communalism - The way out", *Mainstream* (May 24, 1986) 11. Cf. also his book *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi, 1984).
3. Cf. W Owen Cole, *The Guru in Sikhism*, London: Darton, & Todd, 1982, p. 136.
4. Kedar Nath Tiwari "Comparative Religion", Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983, p. 101.



# **DIALOGUE AMONG RELIGIONS : A WAY TO BETTER FUTURE FOR UNITY AND SELF-IDENTITY**

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India is a land of diversity of races, religions, castes etc. It is not an easy task to live in peace and unity with our divergent views and life styles. Of late, tensions are mounting among the religious communities. In the name of religion, untold damage is being done to lives, property and institutions. Life, particularly, for religious minorities is becoming precarious. In this predicament to achieve peace and thereby progress of the nation, we have to forge an understanding among the religious communities to achieve unity without marring their identity. Dialogue or a frank exchange of ideas or views on this issue, in an effort to attain mutual understanding is inevitable. Though this task is herculian, the elite of the country should gird up their loins in venturing forward.

All religions have their own 'dharma' - a set of beliefs and a code of conduct. Every religion has an identity of its own. There is freedom of expression in every religion. There is nothing wrong, if a follower of a particular religion, shares his religious experience with another person of a different religion. But trouble arises if one tries to impose his views on another person. Religion is something which an individual voluntarily

accepts. In this context, the responsibility of interpreters for bringing in disharmony cannot be denied totally. A person who propagates a religion, interprets the religious precepts in the light of his own understanding and clings to them passionately. He wants to impose them on others and tries to get a convincing nod from them. In doing so, he is not aware of the evil effects that crop up in the society which are detrimental to its progress and prosperity. The religious intolerance, unrest and other disturbances are by products of this approach. Sometimes, religious preachings come in the way of harmonious social life. They promote inequalities among the sexes, caste disparities and so on, thus breathing trouble and tension. Sometimes the impact of these religious conflicts are so overwhelming, some reformers of the past sought remedy in doing away with religion and its object of worship, God. But this is no solution. This line of approach was taken in the past by Buddha, later by Auguste Comte and Karl Marx. Buddha was silent pertaining to the matter of existence of God and the human soul. He simply presented a code of conduct (Astanga Marga). Auguste Comte looked down upon the religion as generated out of sheer ignorance and hindrance to the progress of science, consequently the progress of humanity. Karl Marx fought against the exploitation of the proletariat and felt religion is the opium of the masses which lulls and kills righteous anger against the exploitation of the bourgeoisie. But none of these stood the test of time. They in course of time proved that morality itself without religion cannot stand. The early atheistic Hinayana Buddhism, which is more akin to the teachings of

Buddha, later on became theistic Mahayana Buddhism by envisaging Buddha himself as God. Auguste Comte while hoping to abolish theological and metaphysical prejudices of mankind, proposed to replace them with scientific facts, ultimately ended in developing a religion of humanity, by introducing all the paraphernalia required by religion. Here, we have the worship of mankind instead of God. The communist movement which began as scientific materialism and humanitarian reform to usher in social justice, is now considered like a religion, since it furnished all that religion requires, except God. Hence R.E. Fitch says, "that humanistic ethic cannot stand by itself. Either it tends to lose its ethic or tends to move toward religion." Thus history testifies to the fact that mere moral codes without metaphysical basis of religion cannot stand.

Religion is an essential dimension of man. Consequently, it is a universal phenomenon of all cultures. Hence, Tillich says, "Religion is an indispensable need of man". The word "Religion" is derived from the Latin Word "Religio" which means reverence for God. This word is derived from 'Religare' which means 'bind fast'. Aquinas, a 13th century theologian - philosopher, says, "It denotes properly a relation to God. For its HE to whom we ought to be bound as to our unfailing principle." Whitehead a modern mathematician - philosopher held that religious experience gives meaning and purpose to human life. So, we cannot do away with religion. It exists in all societies. Every religion has self-identity and has its own object of worship, God (or Gods). They have their own



religious and moral codes which they observe. These codes of conduct or procedures they adopt, differ. These differences render it difficult for the peaceful co-existence of religious communities. The responsibility of bringing about understanding among the masses to make co-existence possible, mainly rests with the educated people of the society. Gandhiji was right when he said, that the heart of the problem in India lies in the heartlessness of the educated people.

It is a fact that there are individual differences. Each person is unique and different from the other person. Boetius defines a person "as an autonomous source of rational activity". This view does not subscribe to the equality in levelling down all individuals to similar units. The fact that individual as an autonomous agent implies that he thinks and acts in a way he likes as a 'unique being'. Tillich says, that each person is "incomparable, irreplaceable and of infinite significance." This fact involves necessary differentiation of individuals which means inequality. These inequalities are the result of differentiation; and differentiation is essential for beauty and richness of life. There can be no order without inequality. Augustine says, "Order is the arrangement of like and unlike things whereby each of them is disposed in its proper place. Hence inequalities are not for alienating individuals but are meant to bring them together. If there is no differentiation or distinction among individuals, there is nothing one can offer to the other. The inequalities are complementary, for they contribute to the enrichment of individual and social life. They are good

as long as human will, by a kind of perversion, does not undertake to make them to serve as a means of exclusion, rather than communication, to crush the essential equality and primordial unity which they presuppose. These inequalities lend variety to human life and intensify richness of human encounters. They in no way injure the dignity which befit the unity of mankind and the rights which are grounded on this unity. The dialogue between the religions must be addressed to this equality and primordial unity of mankind, by which all human beings can be brought under one camp. All efforts are to be directed to preserve this basic unity of all men amidst their individual differences. In other words, the unity of mankind is to be protected without destroying the uniqueness of individuals.

What is true of individuals is also true of societies at large. The differences which are complementary to social life are to be protected and those differences which lend support to animosity and ill will are to be replaced. Truth is to be appropriated from whichever corner it comes. The ancient Hindu Culture made great contributions for the enrichment of the world in the fields of philosophy, mathematics and medicine. For instance, Susrutha a well known surgeon of ancient India displayed skill and efficiency which is amazing to the modern medical men. But nevertheless, dharmas that are obsolete and unsuitable to the demands of modern life are to be modified or replaced. In this context, the ancient Hindu dharma needs a thorough reinterpretation so as to suit the exigencies of modern

social life. Varna which was based on division of labour, no longer works. We cannot now go back to the Purusha Suktha to maintain four varnas as emerging out of the Brahman from his mouth, shoulders, thighs and feet. We must be bold enough to accept what is rational and good, and strong enough to reject what is irrational and out dated. Dharma comes from the root word 'dhr' which means to uphold or sustain. That dharma which is the sustaining force to maintain supreme values of human life, namely, dignity of the human person and his freedom; and which creates 'The Kingdom of Ends', in the words of Kant, must be sought after. The keynote of this is beautifully expressed by Kant by a way of injunction to all mankind "act so as to use humanity whether in your own person or in the person of another, always an end, never as merely means."

An awareness of the essential unity of mankind, respect for fellow human beings must be instilled and developed in the younger generation. This task should not be the responsibility of men at the helm of affairs alone, but it is a duty of all politicians, political parties, teachers, lawyers etc. a value based education helps to dispel, ignorance, distrust and illwill. It brings about a change in the narrow outlook. Einstein holds, that the function of education and school is to develop these highest moral and religious principles which uphold human dignity. "They should help the young person to grow in" such a spirit that these fundamental principles should be to him as the air which he breathes."



Basically we have to recognise the fact that no man can live in isolation. "Being a man is synonymous with being a co-man". In the same manner no culture\* can develop in isolation. History reveals that there always existed interchange of cultural aspects. India as a land of diversity of cultures, does not need any further explanation to attest this fact. Hinduism itself, in the course of its long history, underwent change amalgamating many other traits from other faiths and cultures. In the same way Christianity and Islam also imbibed many cultural traits of the natives. Hence there is no meaning in boasting about one's own culture. The entire Indian culture represents itself as shared diversity.

With the development of science and technology, the world has become smaller. Distance is no bar to mar human contacts and communication. The world is now not wide enough to provide for segregation of castes and religions. Expediency demands that we should learn to think and understand things in a wider perspective to keep in step with the forward marching nations of the world. A large responsibility lies with the writers, orators and teachers who shape the destiny of the future citizens. They are mainly the trend - setters, responsible for creating public opinion. Intellectual honesty and objective outlook is found wanting in them most often. It is imperative that the educated should have intellectual honesty which elevates them up above prejudices and pet-theories. It helps factual evaluation

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\* Taylor defines culture "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by a man as a member of society."

of things. Some of them instead of promoting mutual trust and goodwill, appear to be instrumental in bringing about hatred and intolerance among people. It is true that we were invaded by Mughals, Britishers and others. But let us not forget the contributions they made for the enrichment of our culture. Muslim Kings contributed for the development of rich architectural monuments, music and literature. It is the great emperor Akbar who first started inter-faith dialogue and is known for his religious tolerance. He was a very successful emperor and his memory remains still in the hearts of Indians. The Christian British rulers were amply benefited by the wealth of our country, nevertheless, they ushered in Modernisation. Besides the unification of India, they provided educational opportunities to all and sundry (without segregating some castes), brought in Industrial revolution, introduced land revenue system, developed communication system, transport facilities by constructing roads, railways, constructed dams on rivers and so on. The Westerners were instrumental in introducing and spreading the literary heritage of India to modern Indians. They saved the manuscripts from destruction, they learnt Sanskrit, they decoded the ancient texts and wrote dictionaries and printed them with the printing machine they brought. All the religious and philosophic literature was made available for the natives only through their good efforts. To do any research in these areas one has to go back to the authority of Western scholars. In addition, they also brought about social reform through legislation to curb many inhuman practises like female infanticide and Sati etc. The preamble to the legislation of 'Sati' reveals the

British attitude towards India. It reads "The Governor general in council without intending to depart from one of the first and most important principles of the system of government of India, that all classes of people be sure in the observance of religious usages so long as that system can be adhered to without violation of the paramount dictates of justice and humanity, has deemed it right to establish the following rules." One has to be impartial in the assessment of historical fact. Distortion of facts, sometimes nourishes illwill among people. We have to shed hatred and try to see good in others. It is the only way through which co-existence is possible. It is not proper to associate the present generations of Muslims and Christians to the Muslim and British rulers of the past. Centuries before Europe received Christianity, India received Christianity in the first century A.D. through St. Thomas, a disciple of Christ.

Whatever may be the historical facts, it is a fact that all these Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains etc. are living together in one country, India. There is a lot of cultural assimilation among them. They are Indians. In spite of their religious differences, there lies a common 'Indianness'. Their being and well-being depend upon their peaceful co-existence. Therefore, attempts are to be made to promote understanding, mutual respect and co-operation which the nation cannot afford to lose sight off. Let us all pray to God along with Tagore, the great poet for the type of nation he aspired for: *"Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake"*.



# **NATION BUILDING & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

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At present various nations are divided in the categories as Developed Nations and Undeveloped Nations. The 'undeveloped nations' are politely called 'developing nations'. The criteria taken for developed nations vary from time to time. Some 20 years back, a country is considered developed in case it has high energy consumption or if it has high transport facilities. After the oil shock, nations realised that high consumption of energy is not a virtue and started reducing the consumption of energy.

The nation is also considered developed in case if it has more destructive power by whatever arsenal it has developed. The nation is also considered developed if it has very good employment potential. The nation is considered developed, if per capita income is high.

Human development is also the part of national development. This contributes very much. For example, if the literacy rate is high, if the health care is good, if law and order is good, if the citizens are free to express their opinions then the nation is good. It is also considered the degree of development for the nation. But there were developed nations who did not have

freedom of speech nor good law and order for the society since the contribution of human development for nation building was considered small.

On the other hand, it is human development which should contribute mainly for nation building. A literate society with good health, with freedom of speech, with freedom to act, the satisfied society which is well off in the field of literature, culture and arts, is really a developed nation. The nation which is advanced in communication, transport and per capita consumption but does not have a developed culture and does not have satisfied citizens can not be considered really developed.

Monetary success of an individual will not automatically translate to satisfaction. Satisfaction and happiness can not be bought by money and material. They have to come from the inner heart and content.

The attitudes of the citizens towards various aspects of life will be conditioned by society. Social values in the society changes over a period of time expecting different things. For example good qualities in the human being like truthfulness were considered social values. Now such virtues are no longer respected in the society. The society values power as a desirable feature. The power may come by physical development or due to right conferred on the individual to use power, or it may be acquired by money. It is the power which is respected.

This shows the deterioration in the value system

in the society since power is to be acquired. There is a mad rush for acquiring the same either by acquiring wealth or by getting employments which will be aid in the power or getting into areas of power like Legislative Assembly, Parliament etc. The situation has come where even acquisition of power by kidnapping and threatening are also accepted as virtues. Somebody said, 'a nation is not sufficiently developed, if the crime scene is not sufficiently developed'. What a pity?

The society in our country was very good, some 50 years back, almost all the houses in the village were of the same type. They were not much of a difference between houses. Only one or two houses were there which will be big and different. The moneyed man was not very much respected compared to the knowledgeable man. An educated person was more respected than the big landlord who was not educated. The elderly people with high morals, were respected in the society more than the moneyed people. The people had their own code for morals, and problems were settled promptly. There was not much of hatred within the society. Even outside cultures were embraced with love. When a person of different languages came to the village, he was accepted as a person with dignity.

Group of people with different languages and different religions were living together. Groups of people with different incomes were living together. In a social function, like marriage, the importance was given only for virtue like uprightness, knowledge and dignity. In fact, money got with undesirable means was viewed with contempt.



Such societies had plenty of time. They were not in a hurry for development. They were more contented. They were more satisfied.

Now we have no time for such things we are in a hurry for every thing. We are mad after money and power. But such developments have occurred in the history earlier. They are the fore runners to indicate the fall of the nations. Great civilisations like Greek and Roman had become failures when such moral weakness was exhibited in the civilisation.

The time has come for us to look into these historical facts. Unless individuals improve their morals and attitudes, the nation can-not develop. It is more dangerous to have a powerful nation with diseased mentalities. Hence, it is time for all to wake up and bring back the glory for which our nation was hailed in the past.



*Special Invitees speaking to the audience  
on the importance of  
Peace and Communal Harmony*





*Special Invitees speaking to the audience  
on the necessity for  
Dialogue among religions*





# INTER - RELIGIOUS CO-OPERATION FOR MUTUAL ENRICHMENT AMONG RELIGIONS

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The present day world has seen tremendous advancement in the realms of science and technology. Man has been able to set his foot on the moon and continue to explore the mysteries of the universe. The computer and the robot rule the roost. The scientific temper has gained utmost prominence. The boundaries of knowledge get extended day by day. But the modern world is a picture of a conglomeration of evils like dishonesty, corruption, hatred, violence, motiveless malignity, mercenary killings, juvenile delinquency, crimes, terrorism, wars and suicides, and it is a world without peace and love. The immediate cause for this turmoil lies in the estrangement between knowledge and wisdom. It is only religion that can show man light i.e., wisdom. The famous Indian invocation is for light and understanding: "Lead me from the unreal to the real; lead me from darkness to light; lead me from death to immortality." Mathew Arnold's lamentation in his "Dover Beach" at the plight of the world is prophetic:

".....the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight  
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

It is to be realised that religion alone can redeem the world and restore to it the lost order and peace. Heaven and hell are irrelevant as long as man's sojourn on the earth is not moulded properly and earth is the right place to love and to be loved. It is religion that shapes the mind of man as religion is a dharma, a way of life.

The different religions in the world are but names, and there is no religion that is bad. It is a fallacy if somebody thinks that his religion is superior to other religions. The ends of almost all the religions are similar, but the means differ. The precepts relating to soul, universal soul, transmigration of soul, the Day of Judgement and rebirth have found acceptance by many religions. There are some differences in matters like sin and salvation. Is man a born sinner? Is man's present suffering the result of his past sins? How is man saved from sin? Is man assured of salvation through repentance? A number of such questions arise, trouble and baffle the mind of a common man. God has endowed man with a wonderful mind which can penetrate into the unknown and find enlightenment. That is what Buddha has accomplished. That is what the saints, the prophets and the seers have done in different ages and in different countries. These wise men have shown the people of the world various paths

of enlightenment and salvation and each path has been labelled by a different name. Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism etc., are just different paths. Their followers practise the different customs that have come down to them. There are various symbols and various rituals, but the goals are the same. Human beings over a wide span of centuries have lost sight of the basic tenets and values of their faiths in their total surrender to the external demonstration of symbols and rituals to the detriment of the essential unity of religions and the sacred spirit of tolerance. The most inspiring, and profound precepts like 'give and take' 'live and let live', 'love thy neighbour', 'God is love' etc., have gradually given place to selfishness, jealousy, hatred, recrimination and hostility among the followers of various religions. This situation necessitates mutual co-operation among religions for the sake of the general well-being of humanity as a whole. There can be no mutual co-operation without a sincere attempt on the part of each religion to understand the essential spirit of the other religions. The essential unity of religions is not to be confused with the principle of uniformity because unity and uniformity in the realm of religion are divergent factors. There is scope for unity and co-operation among religions of the world despite the absence of uniformity. The particular elements in different religions cannot be eliminated. "Religious traditions, rites and ceremonies do not grow in a void. They have roots in the soil and they are nourished by the means the 'way'. Religious teachers should teach their followers to know rightly, to wish rightly, and to act rightly so that they can secure



happiness here and hereafter for themselves and for their fellow creatures.

Secularism is not a panacea for the present religious problems and unitarian - universalism cannot free the world from all its ills caused by misunderstanding and hatred among religions. T.S. Eliot, in his 'Observation on Culture', argues that "the basis of culture is religious belief. It is undeniably true that it is Christianity that forms the basis of European Culture, in the same way that it is the pre-eminence of Hinduism in India that gives to Indian culture its special characteristics." The ceremonial symbols may change but the religious needs of the culture remain. For mutual co-operation among religions questions like "What is the best religion?" and "What is the supreme religion?" should be given up. A wise approach to religion is to work within the parameters of religion with judgement. It is due to such a lack of strong desire to judge well that people fail to understand the tenets of other faiths and become intolerant of them.

Mutual co-operation among religions is not a myth. A constant endeavour to achieve such co-operation is the immediate need. Everyone should have absolute freedom to follow any religion that he chooses. The efforts to convert people from one faith to another through either persuasion or compulsion should be discouraged and even condemned. Any attempts to sow dissensions among the people of one faith by some fanatics of another faith should be dealt with in the same rigorous manner as other criminal offences are

dealt with. Absolute non-interference is the gateway to mutual co-operation among religions. One should not hesitate to read the scriptures of other faiths. In fact, the religious preachers of all faiths should impress on the minds of their followers to read and appreciate the good in the scriptures of other faiths. A common code of conduct and a common prayer would go a long way in cementing fellowship among the followers of different faiths.

All mystics speak the same language because they belong to the same country. That country is the kingdom of Heaven which, as Christ taught us, is within us and not without. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest benefactors of mankind, rightly observes, "By religion I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlies all religions, which brings us face to face with our Maker. Indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This Religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality.

The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions."

Science helps us to conquer ignorance and superstition and religion helps us to conquer fear and selfishness to create the brotherhood of man and build

a great future for humanity. The enrichment of humanity depends upon a meaningful co-operation among religions which is possible only when man's consciousness is raised to a higher and larger level to see the greatness of not only his religion but also the greatness of the other religions.

Dr. Bhagavan Das in his 'Essential Unity of All Religions' proposes that "if religious leaders of different communities had only sufficiently large heart and wise head; would sit down together and consult with each other benevolently; make a good selection from all these very varied forms of manifestation of religious or religion - coloured emotion, especially from the festivals; and would advise their respective followers, each to join with others, in all those selected forms and festivals; then they would double and treble the joy of each community."

AUM - AMIN - AMEN



# **INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE FOR THE PROMOTION OF MORAL, ETHICAL, RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL VALUES**

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In modern times man is disturbed from within and without. The technological progress, urbanisation, sharply rising population, increasing aspirations from one's own life, greed for power and money cause man's distress. When in distress man chooses paths which ironically cause him greater distress and distances himself from solutions which may alleviate him.

The present decade, which is the last of the millennium, saw strife and turmoil, hatred and war, floods and earthquakes, murders and rapes, organised crime, new economic policy which all cumulatively are leading to an utter unconcern for fellow human beings. While some of these are caused by Nature in predictable periodicity, most of them are caused and perpetrated by man.

In his effort to achieve the maximum and enjoy the utmost in one's own life time, man goes all-out to strive and make a mark in life. Tensions are created for himself and others around him in society and at home. Sometimes animosity is bought, even without one's own knowledge. Man becomes wary, suspicious and

suspecting. He fails to find a judicious combination of success in material life and the turbulence it generates. He is also at a loss to seek succour from the Almighty, as he may think his material gain would provide the refuge, which is not the case. This truth most of the times misses most of the man-kind; and it is missed by many others. Riches in society and the matching internal desire in oneself are the dominant driving force of man. He goes in the pursuit at a speed which is uncontrollable even by himself. Even on a few occasions when he can control, he can't do so due to the compelling circumstances which gather around him. He does not know what makes him happy and peaceful. He is not aware what he has, what is sufficient to ensure his peace. Alas! Confusion worse confounded.

It is the Almighty alone who can help man in generating inner strength. Man must struggle to wriggle himself out from the material morass in order to realise the strength that is there within himself, which can be done only with His help. Whatever be his faith, he has to think hard, concentrate, meditate and pray to attain peace around himself and tranquility in mind. It is at this critical juncture in human history, like at no other point of time, that there is an urgent need for an inter-religious dialogue to set in the new millennium of love, harmony and peace.

Need for a dialogue - Man is running after money and wealth, even forsaking moral, human and social values, and even without hesitating to move away from God's path. In this process, he is threatening to snap

the moral fibre of the society. Gullible others follow suit. Truth and Dharma suffer. The quality of life deteriorates, concern for human suffering slowly disappears.

Every faith per se has the potential to set man straight. A collective effort by religions to do this enables the task to become that much easier. Hence, there is need for Inter-Faith Dialogue for the promotion of moral, ethical, religious and social values.

### **Hinduism :**

The word "Hinduism" is based on the Sanskrit name for the river that runs in northern India the 'Sindhu'. Better known as Sanathana Dharma, the eternal faith is the oldest of religions.

Hinduism is based on four vedas (Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Adharvana Veda), Upanishads, epics (Ramayana and Mahabharatha) Puranas, Smrithis.

### **Basic Tenets :**

The following tenets may provide, the key to understanding a faith which is bewildering in its diversity and complexity. The first tenet is the concept of "Brahman", the undying and unchanging reality that encompasses the whole universe. Brahman is the creator, omnipotent and described in various Upanishads. The second tenet is that, the changing



world within man himself is based upon the undying Atman. It is the immortal spark within man, while the unchanging Brahman pervades the entire universe outside. The third tenet is about the relationship between the omnipotent Brahman and undying Atman. There are various great schools of vedanta which define the relationship between the two. The Visishtadvaita of Ramanujacharya opined that they are both unitary and dual. The dvaita philosophers, Madhvacharya believed that they are similar but always separate. The great advaita philosopher, Sankaracharya believed that they are both identical. The fourth tenet of Hinduism is that the supreme goal of life lies in spiritual realisation. In this process the individual becomes aware of the death-less atman within himself; whereby man takes birth, death and rebirth, and pass through the sea of suffering without being excessively bothered. The fifth tenet is that of Karma. It is a concept that includes action, causality and destiny. It is believed that pleasant fruits flow from good deeds and unpleasant consequences from evil ones. While it is true that what a man is today is the result of his past deeds; it is also true that he is the maker of his future by the way he acts at present. Thus the theory of Karma or fatalism gives responsibility to man to shape his future destiny.

In Hinduism the concept of time is cyclical each cycle being divided into four Yugas - Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali. We are living in Kaliyuga. The four taken together form Mahayuga. Virtue and Dharma progressively diminish until at the end of Kaliyuga when there is pralaya that is the tremendous destruction.

After that, the golden age appears. Man's life is expected to stretch over a hundred years and is divided into four ashramas, Brahmacharya, Gruhasthya, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. According to Hindu philosophy there are four goals in life -Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Man has to perform several variants of Dharma at different times, and at different places. One has to acquire wealth, the Artha to satisfy the individual and societal needs. Man can satisfy Kama or sensual desires in accordance with Dharma. The final goal in the Hindu thought is Moksha, release from suffering, old age and ultimately from death. The society is divided into four Varnas: Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra based on their functions in the society.

A person with conviction in Hinduism would believe that the 'Atman' within himself is part of 'Brahman' not only during this life but before his birth and also after his death. The body is purely temporary, ephemeral and transient. One is not born into this world with money and wealth; and after death, one shall not carry anything with him. A realisation of this truth helps man for setting goals relevant to the period of his life.

The four "purusharathas" - Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, when clearly understood and followed, would ensure the satisfaction of the desires and ambitions of the individual within the frame work of Dharma. They would result in social cohesion of men resulting in peaceful and harmonious living.

The varna Dharma helps in the division of labour

in the society which was meant for healthy competition and cooperation among men.

The theory of 'Karma' is often misunderstood for 'fatalism' that is accepting what one gets and believing that one does not have anything to do. On the contrary, in the Hindu thought, it is believed that the present is a result of one's past actions; and, his present actions would determine the future. Good actions bear pleasant fruits and evil actions result in evil effects. So man is bound to be good in thought, word and deed, if he hopes for pleasant fruits. Hence every individual is ordained to be good, to promote moral and ethical values in the society.

The human life, divided into four ashramas - Brahmacharya, Gruhastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa is ordained to carry out different duties during different stages in life. It promotes a religious value and help in the gratification of individual and social needs within the frame work of Dharma.

## **Islam :**

Islam means peace, greeting and salvation. In Islam the prayer commences in the name of God, the most Benevolent and Merciful. Islam also means submission to the Almighty. The Almighty is called 'Allah', unique and unparalleled. Mohammed is the prophet of God. Koran is the holy book.

Man is a free agent, with the ordinances of God



for human conduct. He pointed out two courses - the one leading away from Him, and that is evil; the other bringing man to Him and that is good. It is pure theism with a belief in unity, power, mercy and supreme love of the creator. The Almighty is one and indivisible, is all knowing, all just creator of life and death. With prayer to God many times in a day Islam imbibes supplication by followers to God. It ordains to the followers, devotion coupled with charity and simplicity. There is no middle man between God and the follower and every place is sacred to God.

'Kalma' is the main principle of Islam. It deals with principles of appreciation of God. The first Kalma is 'Tayyab' highlighting the purity and uniqueness of the Almighty and emphasising the prophecy of Prophet Mohammed. There is no God except Allah and Mohammed is the prophet of God.

'Roja', meaning fast, is observed during the month of 'Ramazan'. During this month it is observed as a sacred duty of every Muslim to regularly recite the holy Koran and to complete it. Every Muslim is to observe 'Roja' during the daytime. They do not accept anything during the day into the body including medicines in any form.

'Namaz', meaning prayer, is an important ingredient of daily life. It is 'Salat' in Arabic which also means penance. Men perform Namaz five times a day collectively and individually in Mosques, and women at home. During the month of Ramazan, Muslims offer

'Taravi Namaz,' in addition to regular Namaz, for the whole of the month through which the 'Suras' of Koran are completed to attain Bliss of God.

Another important feature is 'Jakath'. A Muslim is expected to work hard and live on his sweat. Demanding interest on money is forbidden. Besides, poverty is observed and help is rendered to the poor through money, grain, cloth etc. A Muslim is expected to observe the happiness of other Muslims by which Allah is happy as all are His beings. Jakath is to be rendered by all Muslims and the rich are expected to be more generous in order that the riches is properly distributed.

'Haj' is the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. Rich Muslims are expected to go to Haj, i.e, purity. Mecca is the birth place of Islam. Haj is not a tour, but it is submitting oneself to God at the birth place of Islam and attaining purity, wordly and spiritual. Those persons are called 'Hajis'.

There are several aspects in Islam which promote moral and ethical values in society. It ordains regular prayer to God, brotherhood, distribution of wealth to fellow beings, forbidding interest on loans, which strengthen the moral fibre of persons.

Systematic regular prayer, individually and collectively, Salat, Taravinamaz, Kalma, enchanting of Suras from Koran enable persons to attain the Bliss of God. They promote religious values.

Timely and collective prayer, collective food from a single plate, Jakath promotes brotherhood and makes society harmonious.

### **Christianity :**

Christianity is a religion in which the centre of faith lies in Jesus Christ. He is traditionally described as the Man in whom God was made flesh in order to reconcile the world to himself. Christianity emphasises the importance of this world and man's everyday life.

Their traditions are as follows. The main conviction is the active faith in God and giving one's life into His hands. To the Christian, God is the creator. Man has to depend on Him for everything.

He is the Father, caring for his children and disciplining them through the experiences of life and through love. So, man should trust Him.

Human nature is not completely noble. There is a tendency towards evil. So, the Christian seeks forgiveness of sins in the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion and in the day to day worship.

The Holy spirit is the province in which God prepares man to trust in Him and obey His commands and empowers him to serve Him. Christians describe God as a trinity in unity - fatherly care, forgiveness and power. Human beings are equal before God, irrespective of their ability, gender and inherent qualities.



Human nature reaches its perfection by the grace of God. The experience of change is described as salvation. If man ceases to change to God's pattern, he ceases to experience salvation.

The values which make human life noble are found in the Sermon on the Mount and in the teaching of Apostle Paul. Humility before God, forgiveness, mercy, purity of heart, love, care are values which are regarded as the norm for those who are committed to the Christian way of life. Obedience to law, and honesty in day to day life are valued as virtues.

The emphasis on Poverty of spirit, meekness, which are the norm of the Christian way of life strengthen morality and ethics.

Purity of Heart, implying single minded service to God and man, love for enemies as well as friends, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sins, Baptism, Holy Communion raise religious values in the human mind.

Obedience to law enables peaceful living of people in society. Honesty in relation to other people in matters of commerce smoothens interaction among persons. An honest day's pay for an honest day's work and an honest day's work for an honest day's pay is a social principle which ensures harmonious relationship among employees and employers. Sustained love and forgiveness transforms even the wickedest among men.

## **Jainism :**

The Jains are the followers of Vardhamana Mahaveera. A Jain is a follower of "Jin" who conquered the bonds of attachment and hatred. Jainism does not accept the authority of Vedas. It is characterised by the realistic clarification of being, theory of knowledge with doctrines of Syadvada and Sapthabhangi and its ascetic ethics.

Jains admit five kinds of knowledge - Mati, Sruti, Avadhi, Manahparyaya and Kevela. Consciousness is the essence of soul and its manifestations are perception and intelligence. The former is simple apprehension while the latter is conceptual knowledge. In its perfect condition the soul is pure Gnana and Darshana i.e, knowledge and intuition. A prominent feature of Jain knowledge is its Doctrine of naya (angles, aspects or standpoints) knowledge of the thing as it is in itself (Pramana) or of the thing in its relation (Naya). In saptabhangi (seven forms or angles) we use judgement in seven different ways to discriminate the several qualities of an object. This is Syadvada is also known as Anekantvad or multiangular thinking.

The whole universe is traced to the everlasting categories of Jiva and Ajiva, the conscious and the nonconscious. The souls are distinct from matter and they are eternal. The cause of the soul's embodiment is the presence of karmic matter. The self is never separated from matter until its final release. The way to deliverance is through the threeratnas - Right faith,

Right knowledge and Right conduct. Belief in real existence is right faith . Knowledge of real nature without doubt or error is right knowledge. The practice of five virtues known as Panchamahavratas - the Ahimsa, Satya, Achaurya, Aparigraha and Brahmacharya - constitutes right conduct.

In its essence jainism teaches a prayer from childhood which is not an invocation to any particular God but a salutation to all the souls who attained moksha and to sadhus and sadhvis who have the prescribed qualities. It is not merely a faith or belief, but it is a way of life, selflessness and self-aggrandisement in persons cause violence and attempt to suppress others. Ahimsa which is the main principle of Jainism implies that one should not harm any other human being in thought, word or deed. By the emphasis on Satya, the truth speaking, the moral and ethical values are sustained and promoted.

The main prayer of Jains is salutation to all souls who attained moksha. Aparigraha or freedom from possessiveness advocates that one should limit one's possessions to the barest minimum, which enables one to have the right knowledge. The doctrine of syadvada or the saptabhangi encourages man to view a fact from seven different angles, so that one can adopt a broad view, relinquishing a narrow outlook with selfishness.

When strictly observed, satya, achourya and brahmacharya do cause men to be simple, honest and truthful. They reduce stress, turbulence, strife and



turmoil in society. Social living would be that much better.

### **Inter-faith dialogue :**

The word religion derived from Latin, means to bind people. Religion is a systematic life followed materially and spiritually by a group of persons. It aims at worldly simplicity and spiritual brightness.

So every religion uses the bonds of love and sympathy, mutual rights and duties in binding all to God. Religion endeavours to lead men to the that world-soul, from whom their lower nature makes them stray away again and again in following the objects of senses. It binds and keeps their minds fixed on that Supreme Principle of Unity amidst the pressure of daily work, in order to enable them to do that work righteously with proper balance. The power to bind together the hearts of men by the common bond of God, is the power to nourish and maintain high civilisation. Every religion possesses in itself the potential to combine and bind together the men among themselves and to God. When such potential of all religions is identified and brought together through Inter-Faith dialogue, promoted are the moral, ethical, religious and social values among people, across countries, leading to Vasudhaika Kutumbakam, i.e., the whole world is one family.

# VOTE OF THANKS

By  
**Narasimha Das**

Distinguished Persons, Professors, Ladies and Gentlemen we have come to the close of two days Seminar on Inter-Religious Dialogue. When I was asked to conduct this particular meeting by Rev. Dr. A. Suresh, I was surprised to have a call from such a person to take up this task. However my associates of the Bhavan, Dedicated workers of the Bhavan, my evening college faculty, teaching staff encouraged me to proceed with the assignment given to me. After having their moral support, I met Sri G. Mangaiah Garu, Director, Jayalakshmi Tobacco and Dr. K.R.R. Mohan Rao, Former Vice-Chancellor of Nagarjuna University and Chairman, the academic council of Bhavan. Their support to me for conducting this Seminar could not be measured. With their advice, I approached some persons for donation and they have been assured with a smiling face. I also arranged a Press conference for which a number of press reporters assembled and they readily agreed to give a prominent place in their papers, since it is being conducted for the promotion of Harmony, Peace and Welfare of the society. To all the persons mentioned above on behalf of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Guntur Kendra and Catholic Bishops Conference of India, I offer my hearty thanks and gratitude for their help, services and financial support.

I was very much worried about the arrangements

of Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner for all participants. By the grace of God and blessings of the saints, I was directed to meet my sons's friend Sri P. Shivaji. He is the person behind the food arrangement for all the participants. I pray god to give him a long life and prosperity for providing nutritious and delicious food to all of us. I also thank my staff and other friends of other departments who strained to their maximum to make this function a grand success.

I offer my grateful thanks to Sri Shashank Goel, IAS., Collector & District Magistrate and Chairman of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan who gave me guidance and support. Inspite of his busy programme in the election schedule he spared some time to participate in this programme.

Our Chairman of academic council, the former Vice-Chancellor of Nagarjuna University Sr. K.R.R. Mohan Rao closely observing the activities undertaken by me, guided me well in this seminar. He is respected and adored by a number of persons in the academic circle. To such a person words are not sufficient to express my gratitude. However I offer my pranamams to Sri K.R.R. Mohan Rao.

Most. Rev. Dr. Gali Bali, Bishop of Guntur and the Chairman of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, helped me in all the activities. His blessings to me and to this function are the instruments for the success of the meeting. I request him to bless me and accept my pranamams.



I am very happy to state that the Professor of International repute Sri K. Satchidananda Murthy and Dr. N.H. Santhani associated themselves to this seminar and enriched the proceedings with their enlightened thought. I offer my gratitude to such distinguished persons. I offer my gratitude and thanks to Prof. V. Rama Murthy, A.S.R. Murthy, Rajagopala Rao, David Singh, Dr. Lakshmana Rao, K. M. Shah, K. Eswara Rao, A. Krishna Murthy and Abdul Aziz who have submitted their papers for discussion and suggestions to promote communal harmony. Sri D. Appa Rao, District Sessions Judge also evinced keen interest in this programme. He has given his consent to give away the mementos to Professors and distinguished persons. I offer my thanks to Sri Appa Rao.

Now Rev. Dr. A. Suresh, who is looking after the affairs of Inter Dialogue at all India Level, is the key man. His keen interest and his speech enlightened the audience. The Historical background of Inter Religious Dialogue annunciated by Dr. Suresh is a source of inspiration for others to follow suit. In this aspect I pray god to bless him and on my behalf I offer my hearty thanks for making this function a grand success.

I also offer my hearty thanks and appreciation to the press and its reporters for the wonderful work done in reporting our activities in the press. I also pray god to bless the young children who offered their prayers to god for the success of the meeting.







*Closing Prayer Service*



*Participants Thanking and Praising God  
for the Success of the Seminar*





*Cultural Programme on the Promotion of  
Peace and Communal Harmony*

